

Contents

Foreword	7
<u>DIETRICH ECKART</u>	
The poet	19
<u>MAX ERWIN VON SCHEUBNER-RICHTER</u>	
The friend of the Tsar	47
<u>KURT LÜDECKE</u>	
The Playboy	71
<u>EMIL KIRDORF</u>	
The string-puller	99
<u>FRITZ THYSEN</u>	
The big businessman	123
<u>HJALMAR SCHACHT</u>	
The Technocrat	153
Notes	179
Chronology	190
Bibliography	196
Index	204
Picture credits	208

Foreword

In the early days, when the NSDAP was just one splinter party among many, the later dictator Adolf Hitler could easily have failed. Because then, as now, there can be no successful political work without money. The NSDAP leader would have pursued his goals even without financial resources. But he would never have succeeded in turning his young party into a mass movement in such a short time. Influential backers saved Hitler from bankruptcy more than once and promoted his rise to power in 1933: they financed weapons, newspapers, propaganda and the luxury life of the functionaries, they opened the doors to the salons of the rich and powerful.

Who were these people? What made them betray their ideals and ally themselves with the then still insignificant Nazi leader? How did they manage to tap into sources of money? In recent years, historical research has brought together many pieces of the mosaic, which are put together here for the first time to form an overall picture. The portraits are supplemented by unpublished documents, access to the company archives and the records of contemporary witnesses that have come to light. The biographies of the six most important helpers could hardly be more different. They came from all walks of life: an adventurer and conspirator, a drug-addicted poet, a playboy, a corporate heir, an iconic manager and a left-liberal banker. As great as their influence on the Nazi leader was, in the end they all had to pay dearly for their closeness to Hitler.

Financing the Nazi system

When Adolf Hitler joined the German Workers' Party in September 1919, the party coffers contained just 7 marks and 50 pfennigs. "That was a club bureaucracy of the worst kind. So I was supposed to join this club?" Hitler recalls of his political start, "apart from a few guiding principles, there was nothing, no program, no leaflet, nothing printed at all, no membership cards, not even a poor stamp."¹ In order to advance the development of the party, the new party member tried to convene meetings every two weeks: "The invitations to these were written on a typewriter or sometimes by hand on pieces of paper and distributed by ourselves the first few times," said Hitler, "the success was miserable."² Hitler tried to raise additional funds. But it took frustrating work "to collect money in the closest circle without interruption and

to raise a fund of 700 RM in numerous meetings with the greatest frugality. A ridiculous amount that had to be fought for with blood and sweat."³

The party's financial problems remained the basic tenor until it came to power in 1933. The propaganda leader and later NSDAP leader Hitler quickly realized: without massive financial support from outside, the young movement would remain stuck in insignificance - just like the countless right-wing radical organizations that vainly vied for public attention after the First World War and eventually died like a plant without water. The aspiring Nazi dictator, however, worked on his vision early on, which some of his companions considered to be megalomania: The National Socialists should rise to become a mass movement and take power in Germany. The time came in 1933. A number of factors play a role: the old elites reject the Weimar Republic or are at least sceptical about democracy; parties and governments fail to recognize the potential danger of the Nazi movement; economic crisis, inflation and unemployment set the framework for the right-wing radicals to flourish. And: influential financial backers made it possible for Hitler to realize his grandiose plans. The financiers saved the party from bankruptcy and ensured its survival. As early as 1923, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs rightly commented on the Nazis: "As with war, revolution requires 1. money, 2. money, 3. money. No revolution without money."⁴

The political existence of the NSDAP is called into question more than once: after the failed Hitler putsch in the fall of 1923, the NS leader is sent to prison, the party is banned until 1925 and the government confiscates its assets. Until the first Reichstag elections with NSDAP participation, the party's basis remained shaky. In January 1928, the Munich police reported: "The progress of the National Socialist movement repeatedly claimed by Hitler does not apply to Bavaria in particular. In reality, interest in the movement is waning both in the countryside and in Munich. Section meetings, which were attended by 3,000-4,000 people in 1926, are now only attended by 60-80 members at most."⁵ The vote of the German electorate on May 20, 1928 was also disappointing for the National Socialists: Only twelve MPs were allowed to enter the Reichstag - no talk of success. The NSDAP only came into the limelight with the election on September 14, 1930, in which it won 107 seats. Hitler never achieved an absolute majority until he came to power; 37 percent of the votes remained his best result.

Where did the money come from that made Adolf Hitler's rise to power possible? From his party comrades - and from small and large donors. A not

The thesis that has been confirmed is that Hitler was supported almost exclusively by the members' willingness to make sacrifices and their membership fees. Proponents of this assumption rely primarily on the statements of Nazi functionaries such as party managing director Max Amann and treasurer Franz Xaver Schwarz. However, the credibility of these two gentlemen is not very high. As die-hard Nazis, they always stood by their leader Adolf Hitler even after the collapse of the Third Reich and made no critical statements about the circumstances at the time. Apart from that, the sources are scanty - the party documents on finances were destroyed towards the end of the war, "so that there are no indications of the size or sources of income of the Reich leadership at the beginning of the 1930s. With one exception, the financial records of the Gauleitung have apparently also been destroyed", according to historian Henry Turner.

Even auxiliary calculations based on membership figures and contributions are of little use: according to official figures, the NSDAP only reached a truly significant number of members in April 1932, when the number of members exceeded one million, although this figure also included those who had left the party. At this point in time, this also generates considerable income through contributions. However, the threshold of 100,000 members was not passed until the end of 1928.

On the other hand, the lack of documents means that a precise overall overview of the donations and their share of the financial volume is no longer possible. The sources and the more recent results of historical research at least make it possible to identify a number of the major donors. Ultimately, the discussion about the relationship between membership fees and donations is also necessary. The fact remains that the members' money alone was never enough for Hitler's expensive projects until he came to power: for his army of SA thugs and full-time functionaries, for his election campaigns and propaganda battles. A handful of influential sponsors demonstrably organized significant sums for Hitler - money that was not available to other young parties and which significantly supported the spread of the NSDAP. Scholars have so far investigated the sources of money from members and big business; question marks remain over the extent of support from small and medium-sized companies. Medium-sized companies were also happy to give larger sums: For example, on December 20, 1920, the party's cash book shows a donation of 10,000 marks from the company Gebrüder Klinge, Dresden-Löbau, Oststrasse 2-6.⁶

The party's chronic shortage of funds only came to an end after 1933: during the Third Reich, the companies paid the so-called Adolf Hitler Donation, in which all the party's members participated.

sectors of the German economy. The amount of the levy is based on the salary payments of each company - of which 0.5 percent is to be transferred. Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach takes over the chairmanship of the administrative council for the funds. Every year, around 30 million marks are collected for the Nazi coffers - not including the additional income from the unabashed dipping into the state coffers and the confiscation of expropriated property.

Until then, the NSDAP was accompanied by constant financial worries and debts - regardless of its membership. Hitler told his party friend Gregor Strasser about his troubles: "What a problem you think it was for me once to buy a ticket when I wanted to give a speech in Nuremberg." In August 1921, the "Völkischer Beobachter" reported: "The extraordinarily poor financial situation of our party, the lack of any funds for the most urgent needs of propaganda and the like force us to forego holding the meeting at the Krone circus."⁸ Ernst Hanfstaengl, Hitler's intimate from the early days and head of the foreign press after coming to power in 1933, remembers:

"Financial hardship was, especially in the inflation year of 1923, the constant spectre at the back of the party. Again and again, Hitler traveled to real and presumed friends in order to find new funds for the eternally empty party coffers."⁹ His quintessence: "Everything was from hand to mouth, and there were always debts that had to be paid without the means to do so."¹⁰

The party conventions in particular, such as in Weimar in July 1926 or in Nuremberg in August 1927, are expensive. Tens of thousands of supporters arrive in buses or special trains, they need accommodation and food. Hitler, the supreme master of ceremonies, loves the pomp of these meetings with music, flags and his brown guards marching past. After the Nuremberg event, an additional debt burden of 20,000 marks weighs on the NSDAP, so that it has to forego the propaganda show the following year and make do with a "Führer conference" instead, to which only the most important people are invited for cost reasons.

Even Hitler's closest followers suffered from the boss's excessive demands, which caused a notorious low tide in the coffers. Joseph Goebbels after the opening of the Nazi branch in Berlin: "The financial situation was catastrophic. The Gau Berlin had nothing but debts at the time."¹¹ On January 5, 1932, the propaganda chief wrote in his diary: "There was a lack of money everywhere. It's hard to find any, nobody wants to give us credit. If you have the power, you can get enough money, but then you no longer need it. If you don't have the power, then you need the money, but then you don't get it."¹² On November 11, 1932, he noted: "I take a report on the cash situation of the Berlin organization.

the cash situation of the Berlin organization. It is quite dismal. Only low tide, debts and obligations, plus the complete impossibility of raising large sums of money anywhere after this defeat." His entry from December 10 reads: "The financial situation of the Gau Berlin is bleak. We must implement very rigorous austerity measures and place the Gau under self-imposed receivership." December 22: "We must reduce salaries in the Gau, otherwise we will not be able to get by financially."¹³

The financial worries had consequences for individual party members: "It was a time when the SA men were sent out onto the streets to beg for money. They rattled their cans and asked passers-by to donate something 'for the evil Nazis'. The historian Konrad Heiden speaks of debts amounting to twelve million, others of 20 million marks."¹⁴Former Reich Chancellor Heinrich Brüning also confirmed the deficit in his testimony in 1948: the NSDAP had "several million Reichsmark debts" at the beginning of 1933.

"several million Reichsmarks in debt"¹⁵. At that time, the crisis of the Nazi party was accumulating: on January 2, 1933, a tax consultant for the NSDAP reported to the Berlin tax office that the party was only able to pay its taxes by giving up its independence.¹⁶This shows that even the contributions of over one million members were not enough to meet Hitler's needs and that only additional donations from the economy could at least alleviate the financial crisis.

Particularly in the early years of the NSDAP, only the special financiers guaranteed the party's growth. The gap between membership fees and expenditure was almost grotesque.

In January 1921, the party increases the membership fee from 0.50 marks to one mark, half of which is the so-called press tax. The local groups had to pay this tax plus 20 percent of the membership fees plus 50 percent of the advertising fees to the headquarters. The revenue was distributed as follows in the summer of 1930: Head Office 40 percent, Gauleitung 35 percent, local groups 25 percent.¹⁷

A simple calculation shows the imbalance in finances in the early days. The number of members in January 1922 was around 6,000. With a contribution of one Deutschmark, that makes 6,000 Deutschmarks gross income per month. Of this, 3,000 marks went straight to the loss-making "Völkischer Beobachter". The local NSDAP groups kept the bulk of the remaining 3,000 marks. The head office is left with 600 marks after the distribution quota. The headquarters' other income fluctuated, and an imputed amount of 800 marks was probably a generous calculation. The bottom line is an amount of 1,400 marks for Hitler's central treasury. Of these 1,400 marks, the following are to be paid:

1. Rent for the office,
2. salaries for ten full-time staff,
3. Hall rental for the numerous meetings and the monthly "speech evenings" (the entrance fees only cover part of the costs),
4. Fees for the party speakers,
5. Costs for the lavish propaganda with leaflets, posters and stickers,
6. Salaries of the SA leaders,
7. Purchase of equipment, clothing and weapons for the SA,
8. Hand pay for the roll commandos (in July 1921, Hitler paid between 15 and 50 marks in daily allowances to his Schlägergarde),
9. Transportation costs (special trains) for the marches, "German Days",
 10. Costs for the party's "news department" set up by Rudolf Hess in February 1922,
11. Costs for cultural events such as concerts, Christmas parties, etc,
12. Costs for the regularly published "Mitteilungsblätter" and the NSDAP circulars.¹⁸

The list makes it clear that the NSDAP was not self-financing. The cost blocks take on considerable dimensions and increase from year to year under Hitler's restless propaganda battle. An example of expenditure in 1920: 450 marks for 5,000 programs, 1,040.50 marks for legal costs, 695 marks fee for a lecture by Helmuth von Mücke. Although the party only had 675 members in May 1920 - that was less than 340 marks a month in income from contributions.

The year 1923 shows how quickly the costs explode. The already extensive staff of permanent employees has increased further: the payroll already lists 20 people; the employees claim salaries of over 3,000 marks. With the rise of the NSDAP, more and more people were living off the party, hoping to get a slice of the big cake when the National Socialists were in power. This leads to an increase in the number of employees - with corresponding cost pressure on the cash register. Despite their willingness to make sacrifices and despite their fanaticism, the Nazi employees did not work for God's wages, but demanded lavish salaries, as the example of the Cologne-Aachen Gau, as of December 1, 1931, shows: The Gauleiter receives a basic salary of 650 marks, other income, for example from lectures, is extra. The head of organization II receives 1,000 marks per month and the Gau press officer receives 700 marks. The Gau had a total of 20 paid functionaries - not even counting the party's own printing works⁽¹⁹⁾.

Such rising fixed costs were a particular burden on the NSDAP in the 1930s.

"The party organization - after Hitler an embryo state in the body of the old state - cost a lot of money. Thousands of employees received salaries from the party without exercising certain functions, or they held offices that were in themselves superfluous or were already administered by others. The SA, which essentially consisted of unemployed people living in accommodation, must have swallowed up huge sums of money, no matter how small the amount for the individual. If one assumes a wage of only 1 mark per day, which is probably too low an estimate, the result is a weekly burden of 2,800,000 marks."²⁰

These expenses do not even include the special needs of the party bosses. Hitler maintained a personal staff of employees, including a housekeeper, and drove several luxury Mercedes cars. Hermann Göring is notorious for his lavish private lifestyle, which he has paid for by industry. And Hitler's confidant Rudolf Hess bought two BFW-M 23 airplanes in May 1931, which he had registered in his name.

Hitler realized early on that contributions from members alone would not be enough for his ambitious plans and that he would have to look for wealthy sympathizers. His memorandum²¹ from October 1922, in which he calculates his future financial requirements down to the last mark, shows just how systematically the NSDAP leader proceeds to raise external funds. The document was intended for wealthy potential donors, who were to be convinced of the need for a donation. In short, the Nazi leader demanded external financing for his party as a kind of insurance against the rise of Bolshevism. Only the NSDAP could fight it, and it urgently needed money for this, as well as for increased propaganda and expansion beyond the Bavarian borders. Hitler declared almost prophetically that the development of his movement into a power factor in the fight against Marxism would take "30 or 40" years, "but since this time is not available to solve this question, the necessary time for development must be shortened to the utmost by using the greatest means". The Nazi dictator had already generously budgeted the funds required for this, for example by "expanding the business premises, possibly by purchasing his own house - probably a sum of 5-6 million marks required" or by "immediately purchasing trucks to enable the transportation of teams to locations that are somehow threatened". Like a meticulous accountant, Hitler lists his exuberant wishes for his potential patrons:

"Total cost estimate:

A.

1. Office equipment	4 000 000 M
2. Salary depot for the managing directors	3 000 000 M
3. Rotary press, typesetting machine	3 000 000 M
4. Paper purchase	5 500 000 M
5. Operational changeover	600 000 M
6. traveling speakers	2 000 000 M
7. Propaganda material	<u>8 000 000 M</u>
	26 100 000 M

Total

Of this amount, the amount specified under items 2 and 6 could be paid in installments or guaranteed, and the amount specified under item 3 could be secured by a pledge.

B.

1. New office	6 000 000 M
2. Truck	8 000 000 M
3. Fuel (tetralite)	1 940 000 M
(gasoline)	600 000 M
4. Equipment for the assault divisions	8 000 000 M
5. Intelligence service	600 000 M
6. Combat treasure	<u>2 000 000 M</u>

Total M 27,140,000

Of this amount, the amounts entered under points 1 and 2 can be secured by pledges.

There is therefore a total requirement for a generous expansion of the movement to be carried out immediately:

53,240,000 marks,

that is around 95,000 marks in peacetime currency."²²

The list clearly shows that Hitler calculated his financial requirements for the development of the NSDAP very wisely and carefully, even if the demands sounded presumptuous at the time - in the end, with the help of the financiers, he later managed to work through the entire list. This turned out to be the case just one year later, when the Bavarian government confiscated the NSDAP's assets that it could get hold of. The items in the party offices in Munich's Corneliusstrasse and Schellingstrasse alone represent a considerable value: the inventory lists compiled with civil servant-like precision provide an indication of the party's assets. Even small items such as

"2 order bells", "1 plaster bust (Bismarck)" or "1 small packet of poster strips: 'All meetings will definitely take place today'" are included.

included. The liquidator writes about the party's office property: "The value of the oil paintings is missing, which is likely to be several thousand marks given the quality of the paintings. The 6 iron safes seem to me to be valued at a low 5,000 marks, just as the estimate is certainly not too high." It goes on to say: "The motor vehicles are probably worth around 15,000 marks. If one adds to this the items stored in the

'Völkischer Beobachter' Schellingstr. 80/1, all in all, according to my unbiased estimate, this results in assets of over 20,000 marks."²³Of course, these are only the valuables in the offices that the National Socialists did not get rid of in time. Assets in the possession of individuals or money in other people's bank accounts are therefore not listed. The overall result remains astounding: The authorities registered total assets of 170,000 gold marks²⁴- for an insignificant splinter party. This shows that only rich backers could have laid the actual financial foundation for the NSDAP - despite the tireless efforts of its members.

They often work for nothing, put up posters, help build stands, pay for party memorabilia such as pennants, uniforms, brochures, books and rank insignia, and pay entrance fees and their monthly salaries. The NSDAP's problem during its existence remained the members' lack of payment morale. This destroys all the nice calculations on paper about imputed income. The explanation is simple: many supporters come from poor backgrounds or are unemployed, so every mark that has to be paid hurts. On the other hand, the NSDAP lacked a functioning accounting system in the early years that could dun and collect outstanding sums. In June 1921, the party leadership issued the following appeal: "Our resources do not allow us to employ our own cashiers to collect membership fees. We therefore ask our members to pay their contributions punctually at meetings and discussion evenings and if this is not possible to our postal cheque account."²⁵How this works in practice can be seen, for example, in the local group in Kraiburg am Inn in Bavaria. Most of the 50 members are unable or unwilling to pay their contributions. The local group leader, a dentist by profession, therefore paid part of the outstanding amount from his own funds. Another case: at the beginning of 1926, the Hanover district owed the headquarters in Munich 54,790 marks in membership fees.²⁶In 1927, the central party treasury should have collected at least 210,000 marks in total from the German local groups. In fact, only 84,000 marks flowed into the treasury.⁽²⁷⁾The case of Wilhelm Hillebrand shows how adventurous the financial management was.

The functionary, appointed Reich Music Director of the NSDAP in the summer of 1927, uses his example to shed light on the party's hardship and tricks. The SA leader Walter Stennes turned to Hillebrand to "demand 3,500 marks from the party for postage, office rent, travel, etc. This amount was used up in about four months. This amount has been used up in the space of about four months."²⁸ To this must be added 250 marks "compensation for service expenses". The Reich Music Director wrote to the head office - without result: "Nothing but promises were made, but no money was forthcoming." When the rent of 3,500 marks for a Nazi event at the Berlin Sportpa- last became due in 1928, Hillebrand advanced part of the sum himself - he then argued with the party in Munich over the money. He sent the following telegram to Munich on October 4, 1928:

"1. I still haven't received the money from the year yet. Won't you intervene here?

2. so that you can get a small picture of my expenses and my activities, I enclose an excerpt of the money I have spent out of my own pocket as follows:

Travel for visits, business trips

from 4.10.27 to 12.9.28	1370 M
Petty cash from 4.10.27 to 12.9.28	376 M
telephone, books and business expenses from 4.10. 27 to 12.9.28	460 M
For recordings	280 M
For new recordings of plates	1460 M

2 "When am I supposed to get this money back, or do you think that I can continue to make such expenses? I am at the end of my rope and have been ruined economically by the party!"²⁹

The letter exposes the pettiness of the comrades in matters of money and shows that the members massively enforce their demands on their own party - despite all their idealism for Hitler. The Hillebrand case went all the way to the courts, and in the end he resigned from the party in a rage.

Due to his constant financial worries, rich donors are very welcome to Hitler. The Nazi leader carefully concealed these sources of money from the public and his comrades. When he accepts donations himself, he refuses to give receipts and at most hands the donors a party program. This made even the Nazi functionaries closest to the party leader suspicious. Otto Wagener, for example, who was one of Hitler's closest confidants from the fall of 1929 to the early summer of 1933, tried to research Hitler's sources of money out of curiosity. Wagener - who worked as chief of staff of the SA and as head of the economic policy department of the NSDAP - asked Reich Treasurer Franz Xaver Schwarz how Hitler was being financed.

He answers evasively. "But that can't be enough to cover his accommodation, living expenses, car, driver, companion and then the permanent hotel accommodation," says Wagener, "he has to get the funds he needs from somewhere. It's better that you, as Reich Treasurer, organize this than Hitler having money given to him by some financial people on whom he will become dependent over time."³⁰Schwarz gives a vague answer:

"The tax office is very much after our books. They would love to tinker with our stuff. But they won't find any reason to do so. That's why the boss never wants to be on the books."³¹

But the correct tax authorities don't make it that easy for him. They waged a years-long war against Hitler the taxpayer. The files of the Munich tax office have been preserved and provide information about the

Hitler's "official" income from 1925 to 1935: "His tax documents also leave many important questions unanswered - the sources and amount of his income beyond his literary activities, his financial relationships with the NSDAP and the number and amount of private donations he received."³²Because Hitler's ridiculously low reported income proves that he was not taking his civic duties seriously: The Nazi leader does not take his civic duties very seriously - he is a very ordinary tax evader. The tax office only recognized half of Hitler's business expenses over the years. In 1935, it demands 405,494 marks in back payments, wants to send a reminder and threatens penalties. But then, under political pressure, the authorities decided to close Hitler's tax file for good on March 12, 1935. Nevertheless, the documents provide fascinating insights into the NSDAP leader's financial dealings. On May 1, 1925, for example, the Munich tax office writes to Hitler and asks him to submit a tax return for 1924 and the first quarter of 1925. Hitler writes back: "I had no income in 1924 and the first quarter of 1925. I covered my living expenses with a bank loan."³³After the Nazi leader ignored the office's demands, he received a fine of 10 marks, with the option of a day in prison. The officials want to know where Hitler got the 20,000 marks he used to pay for his car in February 1925. It was not until the third quarter that the party leader reported an income of 11,231 marks, less professionally deductible expenses of 6,540 marks and debt interest of 2,245 marks. This would result in a net amount of 2446 marks. Hitler also wrote: "I own neither property nor capital. I limit my personal needs by abstaining from alcohol and tobacco, I eat my meals in the most modest restaurants and apart from my low rent, I do not incur any expenses that are not part of the deductible professional expenses of a political writer."³⁴One of the legends is that Hitler was not able to benefit from the royalties from "Mein

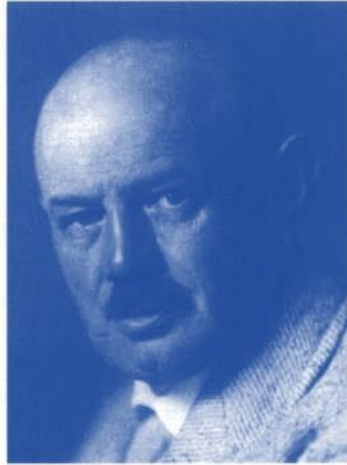
Kampf". The tax records clearly show that the income from book sales - easily verifiable by the tax authorities - flowed slowly for years. In 1928, for example, Hitler sold 3,015 copies, the following year 7,664. The breakthrough only came in 1933, when "Mein Kampf" sold 854,127 copies and brought the author a generous income for the first time.

In total, Hitler reported the following gross income³⁵ in marks:

1925	19 843
1926	15 903
1927	11 494
1928	11 818
1929	15 448
1930	48 472
1931	55 132
1932	64 639
1933	1 232 335

Hitler knows how to win over powerful personalities - even if only a comparatively small circle of people until 1933. Large-scale industry and landowners were reluctant to finance the NSDAP before it came to power; the radical party program, which called for partial expropriation and the "breaking of the bondage of interest", deterred many entrepreneurs. It would therefore be incorrect to speak of a massive pro-Hitler alliance of big businessmen before 1933. On the other hand, it would also be wrong to assume that the German business elite stood completely on the sidelines. In the early years, it was more influential individuals who opened doors and coffers for the Nazi leader through their contacts. In the final years before the takeover of power, however, a few prominent business leaders stood out, lending Hitler a helping hand and using their example to persuade others to join in. But that was enough: in the end, the nation was left with the dictator Hitler.

DIETRICH ECKART



The poet

An open sports plane takes off from Augsburg on a home mission on March 16, 1920. Passengers: the poet Dietrich Eckart and his companion, "the then still completely unknown Hitler".¹ Both wanted to support the put- schist Wolfgang Kapp in Berlin, who had just driven out the government with the help of armed troops and was himself striving for a right-wing dictatorship. Hitler, as a liaison officer in the pay of the army and propaganda leader of the newly founded National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP), is on an airplane for the first time. A storm shakes the plane and Hitler has to vomit several times during the journey. A lack of fuel forces the plane to make an emergency landing in Jüterbog near Berlin. Striking workers stop them and threaten to arrest them both. Eckart, with a bald head, bass voice and bulky build, pretends to be a paper merchant, Hitler, with a glued-on goatee, introduces himself as his accountant. The two are allowed to fly on. But they are too late: the putsch has already collapsed in the Reich capital and Kapp is on the run. Eckart says to his partner in frustration: "Come on, Adolf, we have no business here anymore."²

The journey of the two thwarted coup sympathizers is not entirely in vain. Eckart, 51 years old at the time, takes his young friend to visit the Bechsteins, who live in an imposing house in the city center, whose interior exudes the luxurious style of the upper middle classes. Eckart knows Edwin and Helene Bechstein, co-owners of the famous piano factory C.

Bechstein, from his days as a theater dramaturge in Berlin. He introduces the party functionary from Munich to his acquaintances - a contact that subsequently proves to be very profitable for Hitler and the NSDAP. Mrs. Bechstein, with cherry-sized diamonds around her neck and wrist, greets Hitler graciously and is taken with his initial shyness. In future, the party leader would regularly visit his patron in Berlin. Or the Bechsteins invited him to dinner in their hotel suite in the "Bayerischer Hof" when they were visiting Munich. The young Nazi leader, otherwise only accustomed to his rude party colleagues, was enchanted by the elegant appearance of his hosts - and at the same time embarrassed. Hitler tells the wife of his friend Ernst Hanfstaengl: "Mrs. Bechstein in a large evening toilette, Mr. Bechstein in a tux and the waitress in livery - you can imagine how terribly out of place I felt in my blue suit. And they only drank champagne throughout the evening. And then there was the bathroom - Jesus, the splendor! You could even regulate the water temperature!"³ Mrs. Bechstein, "who was devoted to Hitler with maternal benevolence", advised Hitler on clothing and persuaded him to buy a fine wardrobe. He buys himself a tuxedo, starched shirts and patent leather boots and learns from his prominent teacher how to present himself in style in upscale circles. More important for the NSDAP chairman and his friend Eckart than such courses in correct behavior, however, was the fact that the businesswoman not only opened her heart, but also her purse on a regular basis. The Bechsteins guaranteed a bank loan of 45,000 marks for Hitler, but there was no question of repayment; they had to take over most of the sum.⁴ Helene Bechstein later stated that the family had supported Hitler "repeatedly, that is, two or three times, financially" and that she personally also supported the Nazi leader, "but not with money. Rather, I gave him some works of art to use, with the remark that he could do what he wanted with them. These objects of art are of a higher value."⁵

Hitler could make good use of such natural objects from Eckart's circle of friends; he used them as collateral to obtain loans and thus advance the development of the financially parched party. This is shown by the loan agreement with the Nazi sympathizer and coffee manufacturer Richard Frank ("Korn-Frank") in Berlin, an acquaintance of Eckart. The document reads as follows:

"1) Mr. Adolf Hitler confesses to having received the sum of 60,000 Swiss francs, in words - sixty thousand Swiss francs - as a loan from Richard Frank on August 20, 1923.

This loan is to be repaid within three years, i.e. by August 20, 1926 at the latest.

2) As security for the loan, Mr. Adolf Hitler transfers to Mr. Richard Frank ownership of the following valuables deposited with the Heinrich Eckert bank in Munich in the name of Mr. Max Amann:

No. 1 An emerald pendant with platinum and diamonds with a platinum chain

No. 2 A ruby ring in platinum with diamonds

No. 3 A sapphire ring in platinum with diamonds

No. 4 A diamond ring (solitaire), diamonds set in silver, 14 carat gold ring gold

No. 5 A Venetian relief lace, hand-sewn, 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ mtr. long, 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ cm wide (17th century)

No. 6 A red-silk Spanish winged coverlet with gold embroidery (size 4 x 4 mtr.).

3) Certificate of deposit from the Heinrich Eckert bank in Munich is hereby handed over to Mr. Richard Frank.

It is expressly stated that the depositor Max Amann acted as managing director of Mr. Hitler on his behalf and with his power of attorney.

4) The contract also stipulates that neither the lender nor the borrower may dispose of the deposited valuables before the loan repayment date, i.e. August 20, 1926."6Once again, Dietrich Eckart's connections proved to be very profitable for Hitler - as was often the case in the early days of the Nazi movement. This supporter ensured that the NSDAP did not get stuck in its start-up phase: Eckart organizes the financial fertilizer with which the party quickly develops into a weed. At the same time, the "splendid specimen of an old Bavarian with the appearance of an old walrus"7is one of the most dazzling figures in national socialist history. Although Eckart is not exactly a role model for young people: a drug addict, a poet and journalist, a racist of the worst kind, a womanizer who constantly wavers between bankruptcy and prosperity, whom friends unanimously characterize as grumpy and know-it-all, but also as good-natured and generous - and in financial matters a slob. Otto Dietrich, later Reich Press Chief of the NSDAP, State Secretary in the Ministry of Propaganda and one of Hitler's favorites, confirms the poet's outstanding importance: "Eckart was the man who, according to Hitler's own repeated statements, had the greatest significance for his life. He was Hitler's best friend and can be regarded as his spiritual

Father ... From the proceeds and royalties with which he supported his friend Hitler, he made it possible for him to build up the party in its early days. Eckart knew a circle of wealthy citizens whom he sought out to support his magazine. He also introduced Hitler to them. They were Hitler's first patrons or, if you like, financial backers."⁸The extent to which the party dictator held his protégé in high esteem is shown in his book "Mein Kampf", which he dedicates to his friend "who, as the best of men, has devoted his life to the awakening of his people, our people, in poetry and in thought and, in the end, in deed: Dietrich Eckart"⁹, according to the conclusion of the work. The Nazi leader retained such reverence throughout his life. He explained to his secretary during the Third Reich, Christa Schröder, that his friendship with Eckart "was one of the most beautiful things that had happened to him in the 1920s".¹⁰Hitler raved about the "wonderful skull of this best German" and the "powerful forehead, blue eyes, the whole head like the head of a bull. And on top of that, a voice with a wonderfully rich sound"⁽¹¹⁾.

How did this strange liaison between Eckart and Hitler come about? What drives the older man to actively support the radical right-wing group and its fanatical leader? What financial transactions did Eckart use to gain his reputation as the "father of the Hitler movement", the "founder of Hitler" and his "accomplice"?¹²During the first 50 years of Eckart's life, there was nothing to suggest his unusual career as one of the pillar saints of National Socialism. He was born on March 23, 1868 in the town of Neumarkt in der Oberpfalz, the son of the notary and judicial councillor Christian Eckart. His mother, Anna Bösner, came from a family of foresters in the Upper Palatinate town of Pressath. She, the second wife of the widower Christian Eckart, who was 22 years older, brought up her four children in the Catholic faith, although their father belonged to the Protestant community. Only their mother's protection saved Dietrich and his siblings from the moods and sudden outbursts of anger of their dominant father. Anna Eckart was left with the burden of running the household and caring for the children; her husband lived entirely for his job and barely found time for his youngest children. In May 1878, when Dietrich was just ten years old, his mother died, barely 36 years old. This hit the boy hard: maternal security gave way to constant confrontation with his father. Dietrich develops a rebellious nature, always ready to argue - a trait that accompanies him from then on, as does his urge to isolate himself, to flee inwards. The trouble in the family seems unstoppable - the arguments with his father increase from day to day. The rebellious boy also frequently causes trouble in class. As a result, Dietrich constantly has to change schools - as an adult, he boasts that he has attended a total of seven different grammar schools. The Abitur

He struggles to finish school, his father worries about his offspring: What now? What profession for the unruly boy?

Christian Eckart decides that his son should become a doctor, a decent, middle-class job with a secure income. Reluctantly, Dietrich begins his studies at the University of Erlangen. He joins the fraternity Onoldia, to which his father had already belonged. It comes as it must: Dietrich Eckart fell out with the other members of the fraternity, dropped out of university - and was never to return.

During his time at university in Erlangen, he was joined by new shadowy companions: drugs. The trigger for this remains unclear: was it depression, lovesickness, the desire to get high or simply the attraction of doing something forbidden? In any case, the studiosus obtains morphine, which is not difficult for the medical student. The substance gives Dietrich Eckart access to an inner, metaphysical world and takes him away from materialistic reality for a short time - a motif he would later use several times in his dramas. Alfred Rosenberg, Eckart's friend and co-worker at the "Völkischer Beobachter", describes the situation: "He could not live without the sweet poison and used all the cunning of someone possessed by this passion to constantly procure new doses. In the end, he took daily doses that would have killed an ordinary person with a less powerful disposition."¹³ From then on, morphine remained his constant companion and became part of Dietrich's personality, even when he worked for the NSDAP and Hitler - Dietrich Eckart, the first Nazi junkie. The drug led to him dropping out of university and the young man became so addicted to the substance that he was admitted to an insane asylum for withdrawal. This is the first low point in Dietrich Eckart's life: he, who feels called to greater things, in the midst of all the mentally ill, the dregs of society. In keeping with the paradoxical surroundings, this is the first time that Eckart acts out his urge to become a playwright - he performs the play "Der Wildschütz" with the inmates, just as his famous role model Marquis de Sade once did before him.

The opium derivative alone was not enough for him, the trance states were too short and obtaining the addictive substance was too complicated. Dietrich Eckart therefore turned to another drug early on - alcohol. He consumed large quantities of wine and beer until his death. His addiction may also be the reason why he was not called up for military service at the beginning of the First World War. But he did volunteer.

When he returned to his hometown of Neumarkt after his first withdrawal, he quickly became a regular in the local pubs: in his friend Steinbach's wine bar, in the "Goldener Stern", in the "Gans" or in the Lamms brewery.

Lamms brewery. When his father tries to stop young Dietrich from visiting the pub once in winter, he hides his son's clothes. What does the junior do? He marches off in his underpants to his drinking buddies and his beloved glass of wine.

Later, in Munich, he preferred to socialize in the Schwabing wine bar "Brennnessel", in the "Fledermausbar" and of course at Hitler's regulars' tables on Monday evenings in the "Café Neumaier" on Viktualienmarkt and in the "Café Heck" on Odeonsplatz with his inner circle of confidants: Hitler's former sergeant Max Amann, the DAP chairman Anton Drexel, the party worker Hermann Esser, the horse dealer Christian Weber and Ernst Hanfstaengl, son of a publishing family.

Once he has consumed enough wine and beer, Eckart gets into his stride and covers his companions with witty or, depending on his mood, political speeches, his voice getting louder and louder. His alcohol consumption is also reflected in his first attempts as a poet. The 25-year-old writes poetry:

"Out you last little Hellerlein
From your brief rest!
A traveling scholast cannot save on
golden wine.
Away there, away there with the dirt
there Fidel be he done,
For what the next morning brings, That's
none of my business today!
Philistines on the stove bench
Don't look so sad! If you drank
like me in life, you'll never
change.
Just hum, just hum and just fall silent, That's all
one to me!"¹⁴

The young Eckart has put his attitude to life on paper in just a few lines. The morphine and the binge drinking were taking their toll on the man: his hair fell out early on, his once ascetically cut face rounded out and his girth increased. Eckart's health erodes and he repeatedly goes to rehab, for example to the Blankenburg sanatorium. When he worked for Hitler, he was unable to work at all for days on end, showing signs of breakdown and needing periods of rest. A medical certificate dated April 19, 1923 states:

"Mr. Dietrich Eckart suffers from hypertrophic liver cirrhosis, intermittent bleeding from the upper esophagus (esophagus), arteriosclerosis."¹⁵

Dietrich Eckart's father dies in August 1895. As a result, the 27-year-old son receives a considerable inheritance, which enables him to lead a carefree life. This is actually an ideal basis for the bon vivant Eckart to pursue his new goal, poetry and writing, undisturbed. But his demons catch up with him, the "handsome fortune that Eckart, for whom money was never an end in itself, who always gave to everyone, even to complete strangers, gladly and lavishly, spent in just a few years"¹⁶, recalls his childhood friend Albert Reich, a painter. The fact that he squandered the money so quickly was not only due to Eckart's addiction to pleasure, but also to his good nature. Despite his admiration for his friend, even Hitler soon recognizes his weakness:

"He sold or gave away at least eighty quarters of a sow; he promised something to everyone he met; that's the way it is with these people! But you can't get things moving without these people!"¹⁷This shortcoming was to bring Eckart to the brink of bankruptcy again and again in later years, with the NSDAP as the beneficiary. Eckart finally devoted himself to writing. He wrote several poems about the beauty of nature and tried his hand at journalism. He publishes novellas, studies and political observations. He writes reviews of the Bayreuth Festival for the "München-Augsburger Abendzeitung". This is how he meets Siegfried and Winifred Wagner and later introduces them to Hitler. This access to Hitler's highly revered family of artists created by Eckart paid off for the Nazi party in hard cash. Winifred Wagner in particular had been financially supporting the radical right-wing group since the 1920s.

In 1899, Eckart moved to Berlin to pursue his literary plans. A new passion burns within him: plays. For over 15 years, he put dramas and comedies on paper. But the ten actors usually only manage one or two performances before the work is taken off the repertoire. For some plays, such as the politicizing comedy "A Guy Who Speculates" or "Lorenzaccio", which is set in Florence during the Medici period, Eckart did not even manage to bring his work to the stage during his lifetime. Eckart usually tried his hand at socially critical or historical themes. He called his first play a "tragic comedy" with the title "Family Fathers". The main character is a journalist named Heidenreich and is obviously based on Eckart's own life situation as an editor at the

"Berliner Lokalanzeiger". The hero writes a comedy that is accepted by the theater, but the evil newspaper owner Hintze prevents the performance. In the end, Heidenreich commits suicide, declaiming the bitter realization: "First your soul is squeezed out of your body and then you are killed."

one is thrown away like a rotten lemon."¹⁸This is followed by works such as "The Frog King", in which an impostor and outsider fights against his materialistic environment, or "The Hereditary Count", who kills himself after he learns that he is of bourgeois descent and that aristocratic society excludes him because of this. The only positive figure in "The Hereditary Count" is Professor Holbach, a "great artist" who shines with "immortal works". His motto: "I only call noble those who have an ideal within them in which they firmly believe; for this distinguishes them from the crowd, who only know material needs."¹⁹Eckart would later find his ideal in the person of Adolf Hitler. The spectators of the plays yawn, hiss, someone even whistles artfully on his house key. And the critics did not have a good opinion of Eckart's dramaturgical performances: "Distant, alien, dismissive, lifeless, indifferent"²⁰, according to the magazine "Der Kunstwart". The "Berliner Tagblatt" writes about the

"Froschkönig": "The so-called comedy of Mr. Eckart is a single phrasal concoction that spouts a lot of nonsense."²¹Such criticisms hit the aspiring playwright to the core. Not only because he felt his honor as a writer had been violated, but also because his plays did not find enough of a paying audience - the modest royalties were not enough to make a living. For twelve years, Eckart lives on the edge of subsistence. For a visit to Count Georg von Hülsen-Haeseler, the director of the Königliche Schauspiele in Berlin, the poet has to borrow a clean shirt, a pair of trousers and a jacket from acquaintances, as he has no better clothes of his own. Eckart no longer understands the world - why doesn't society recognize his genius? "It can't be my talent," the playwright laments, "so it must be my world view, my hostility to everything that is shallow and pandering in our time."²²He humiliates himself and constantly writes begging letters to the director Hülsen-Haeseler, which Wilhelm

II "Masterpieces of the art of pumping": "If I did not have firm faith in my dramatic creative power, I would much rather hide away today in the most miserable corner of this city than once again - I swear: for the last time! - to be a burden to Your Excellency's generosity"²³, Eckart says. The director sometimes pays him 100 marks, sometimes 150 marks. Even the occasional newspaper article or advertising copy for a pharmaceutical company were not enough for the poor poet to lead an orderly life. Eckart regularly has to spend the night in backyards or on a park bench in Berlin's Tiergarten like a bum - the next low point in his life.

He is rescued by a play that, ironically, does not spring from his own genius, but from someone else's: Dietrich Eckart translates and adapts Henrik Ibsen's

Dietrich Eckart translates and adapts Henrik Ibsen's "Peer Gynt" for the stage; the play premieres in 1914 and is performed around 500 times during Eckart's lifetime. He identifies with the main character, a seeker who also appears in an insane asylum. His success finally secures him a reliable, comfortable income, which is bolstered by his lucrative stake in the Neue Aeroplan construction company owned by his boyhood friend, the aircraft manufacturer Bomhard, and guarantees him prosperity from then on.

In 1913, Eckart's alcohol and drug problems took him to the Schwarzeck sanatorium in Bad Blankenburg in the Thuringian Forest. There he met Rose Marx, the sister of the owner of the sanatorium. Rose Marx, born Wiedeburg, came from a family of dentists in the Rhineland and was living as a widow with three daughters at the time. And the poet takes a bold step: he marries Rose in September of the same year and moves from Berlin to Blankenburg.

What drives him to marry? Is it the longing for security, for a home, for a steady partner? At any rate, Cupid has no hand in it: his friends call it at best a "community of thought" or "sense of responsibility", but they also describe the "contrasts that lay in the nature of the two spouses" and the fact that the poet only "slowly gets used to family life".²⁴ The poet prefers the regulars' table in the pub to his own home, where, surrounded by men, he tells his anecdotes and political philosophies in a strong voice. Eckart shares this preference for the company of like-minded comrades with Adolf Hitler, who makes many female acquaintances, but in whose innermost circle of power a world of male alliances prevails - a world in which women have no place. Commenting on Eckart's marriage to Rose, his friend Rosenberg said: "This purely male affair destroyed a harmony that both parties had always longed for and which could not be eliminated in any other way than by breaking up."²⁵ The partnership fell apart and the two divorced in March 1921.

The roots of Eckart's problems with the opposite sex go deeper. He is a self-confessed misogynist, not to say misogynist. In an essay, he mocks the alleged inferiority of women, allowing feelings at best as a reflection of his own ego: "When a man loves, it is from the moment he sees his ego miraculously embodied in a woman."²⁶ Such an attitude was "a deep tragedy in Dietrich Eckart's life", Rosenberg believes and describes: "Eckart saw a tendency towards the inane as the essential in women, declared her incapable of really grasping the profound, occasionally denied her the will to do so altogether.

He had a particular antipathy towards the politeness of women and declared it to be a sign of our feminine times. The woman is nature, hardly more."²⁷The poet transfers his contempt to his characters in the plays, drawing unsympathetic, even hostile female figures - such as Gerda and Hedwig in the "Frog King", the troll princess in "Peer Gynt" or Veronica and Semiramide in "Lorenzaccio". In the historical drama "Lorenzaccio", Eckart has the hero Lorenzo say to his mother:

"You mothers make it hard to revere you;

For what you want, in your innermost desire,
is often the opposite of your teachings."

At another point, Eckart formulates his view even more clearly through the male protagonist:

"As if what nature conceals could ever be
seen through or even explained!

The hatred that smoulders between man and woman,
it is nature and incomprehensible like this.

It will one day destroy the whole world. Then at
a given sign the women will all, as they are,
revolt, United with thousands of my kind, Who
belong to them only too eagerly."²⁸

"Peer Gynt" provides Eckart with a solid flow of money and a certain recognition as a playwright. All in all, however, displeasure and disappointment predominated: almost all of his works failed to achieve the praise from the intellectual elite that the poet had so hoped for. Hitler, on the other hand, admires Dietrich Eckart, who is 21 years his senior: from his point of view, the playwright has already achieved some notable successes and can boast about his acquaintances and famous names. And both feel a kindred spirit: Both are misjudged by an "ignorant" environment that does not appreciate their artistic ability. Just as Hitler was rejected at the Academy of Painting in Vienna and galleries and museums spurned his paintings, Eckart came up against a wall of rejection in the theater guild. It did not occur to either of them that there might be something to the judgment of their contemporaries. Hitler raves about his friend's achievements:

"Dietrich Eckart has written poems as beautiful as Goethe."²⁹And the poet himself does not suffer from modesty either. In a letter to the Bavarian State Commissioner General Gustav von Kahr, Eckart wrote: "I am not just any old person, but someone who has already achieved a great deal in his life. My dramatic works are all creations of philosophical maturity. Even without the admiring judgments of outstanding experts, I would know

I would know that this work can easily stand alongside 'Faust' and 'Hamlet'."³⁰

Despite such blatant overestimation of himself, the poet is annoyed that the experts deny him the respect he deserves and reject him. Since it cannot be his fault - he sees himself in the lineage of Goethe and Shakespeare - it follows that others must bear the blame. Around 1915/16, Dietrich Eckart discovers who is responsible for his failure: the Jews. His future life theme coincides with the Eckart family's move to Munich. The atmosphere of the Bavarian capital during the war provides the poet with a breeding ground for a complete reorientation in his work - towards political activity. In the years that followed, his anti-Semitism took on ever sharper traits. His philosophically and religiously based front against the Jews was a much more comprehensive conceptual structure than Hitler's diffuse anti-Semitism at the time, which was fed by various sources. Eckart became one of the most important early sources of inspiration for the Nazi leader's fanatical fight against the Jews. From 1920 onwards, under Eckart's influence, Hitler's tone on this subject became increasingly venomous and irreconcilable.

For the poet, this explains his failures: the rule of the Jewish artists ruined his theater career. Eckart claimed that a comedy with the character of the Jewish bath stove manufacturer Moritz Silberstahl had failed because he had refused to remove the man from the play. The director of the Berlin theater had justified his refusal with the argument "because we always have a lot of Jews in the theater, our best payers". And a theater critic from the "Berliner Lokalanzeiger" said: "For all your talent, you'll never get anywhere if you don't kowtow to the Jews."³¹ Whether fictitious or true, Eckart was under the delusion that the Jews were to blame for his misfortune. His favorite poet Heinrich Heine shows just how grotesquely his views change. In his early years as a writer, Eckart celebrated him as the "direct forerunner of our modern German literature", as a "songful prince of song who had given his people the most beautiful pearls of lyrical poetry". He even compiled a volume of Heine's poetry and wrote a laudatory biography of him. Eckart entitled a travelogue "A summer fairy tale" - as a homage to Heine's "Germany - a winter fairy tale". The total change in 1918: he scourges the "Jew" Heine in disgust, whose "buffoonery", whose "malice and perfidy", which led to the destruction of the German essence. At the same time, Eckart founded the nationalist pamphlet "Auf gut deutsch", distributed right-wing leaflets entitled "To all working people" in Munich during the Soviet Republic and founded a "German Citizens' Association". He turned

Eckart transformed himself from a playwright into a radical right-wing agitator. Eckart used the term "Third Reich" as early as July 1919 in his essay "Luther and the Interest Rate".³² According to Eckart, the Jewish, materialistic race and the Aryan, metaphysical race are irreconcilably opposed to each other in the world: "Everything shows that Judaism belongs to the organism of mankind like certain bacteria belong to the human body," the poet preaches. "So we have to accept the Jews among us as a necessary evil for who knows how many millennia. But just as our body would atrophy if those bacteria developed beyond a healthy level, so too would our people gradually succumb to spiritual infirmity if the Jews were to overgrow it." His conclusion: that "there are only two kinds of people on earth, at least among the cultural peoples: the Jews - and the rest."³³ This unspeakable racism already foreshadows the later Hitler, who would translate such verbal attacks into brutal violence. But Eckart also sounded the attack fanfare in his writings: "Anyone who avoids the Jewish question is my enemy, even if he is a direct descendant of Hildebrand and Hadubrand. I will fight him to the death, all the more passionately the more shamelessly he wears the national cloak."³⁴ It is only a small step for the fanatic to suspect a world conspiracy behind all this: "It is international Jewry, supported by the international organization of the banking and stock exchange system, supported by the closely interlinked Masonic lodges of the whole world, that holds its deed of domination!"³⁵

Eckart cares little that such outrageous claims are beyond any logic or facts - he is interested in ammunition for his propaganda, a method that would later be perfected by Hitler. But the poet did not stop at strong slogans, he also wanted to see action: "Jews who have been expelled from the country and cross the Reich's borders again will be hanged", according to his "Auf gut deutsch" from 1919, "Jews who seduce German girls will be punished with a prison sentence of no less than three years."³⁶ Eckart would prefer to "load all the Jews onto a train and take them to the Red Sea"³⁷, an acquaintance recalls a conversation from January 1920. Unfortunately, this idea became a cruel reality two decades later as a result of the Holocaust. His "Judenheft", a special edition of "Auf gut deutsch" from 1920, which sold a total of 100,000 copies, shows just how much Eckart's radical slogans resonated with the German right-wing scene. In it, he spitefully attacked his political opponents, while his friend, the portrait painter Otto von Kursell, contributed disfiguring caricatures of the victims - the inflammatory articles in "Stürmer"

during the Third Reich hardly surpass those early publications in aggressiveness. So this is the man Adolf Hitler met in the autumn of 1919, Dietrich Eckart, a poet and playwright with a wide circle of friends and acquaintances, a radical political agitator, an anti-Semite - and an outsider, someone who clings to his own superiority, who feels misjudged by society. The parallels to the disgruntled painter from Braunau are unmistakable. It is therefore not surprising that the two quickly become friends - Eckart remains one of the few people who are allowed to be on first-name terms with Hitler. Hitler remembers their first meeting at a meeting of the NSDAP predecessor, the German Workers' Party: "Harrer was talking endlessly, that is, he was trying to talk, when suddenly a deep, rasping old gentleman's voice interrupted: 'Now stop this nonsense, nobody gives a damn. ' I could have thrown my arms around Eckart's neck. Harrer concluded his unfortunate presentation and Eckart left, but was introduced to me by Drexler under the door."³⁸ Hitler later spoke of himself as a "pupil" of his "fatherly friend" Eckart, calling him his "polar star". The young party member Hitler admired the old man's skills: "Everything the others wrote was so flat. When he was ranting, it was so witty! I was still an infant stylistically back then."³⁹ What does Eckart see in the then 30-year-old? "I felt drawn to his whole manner," the writer later admitted to the police, "my relationship with him became closer and closer."⁴⁰ But Eckart's enthusiasm for his young friend also had other reasons - he was looking for someone to put his political ambitions into practice. It was clear to the poet that although he had a way with words, practical, regular party work and convincing crowds was not his thing. That is why he is on the lookout for a personality who will take up the fight for Germany. Even before Eckart met Hitler, he outlined his ideal image of a future leader: "A guy who can hear a machine gun must be at the top. The mob must get scared in their pants. I can't have an officer, the people no longer have any respect for them. The best thing would be a worker who has his mouth in the right place. I'd rather have a vain monkey who can give the Reds a juicy answer and doesn't run away from every swinging chair leg than a dozen learned professors who sit trembling on the damp seat of their pants. It has to be a bachelor, then we'll get the women!"⁴¹ As early as 1921, he steadfastly believed that he had found this man: "Hitler is of this type, the artery of wrath of the German Workers' Party."⁴²

Eckart was one of the first to establish the later "Führer" cult. His efforts in the summer of crisis in 1921 made it possible for Hitler to become 1st Chairman of the NSDAP with far-reaching powers. Hitler had previously announced his resignation due to differences with the previous chairman Anton Drexler. The party is divided due to Hitler's tough stance. Only Eckart's mediation between the squabblers brought about a reconciliation, which ended in August 1921 with Drexler as honorary chairman and Hitler as the new party dictator - otherwise the NSDAP might not have had a disastrous history. Eckart crowned his admiration for the Nazi leader in April 1923 with a specially written birthday poem for Hitler:

"Five years of hardship, such as no nation has
ever suffered! Five years of excrement,
mountains of meanness!
Destroyed what proud ardor and purity, What
greatness Bismarck once won for us!
And yet - no matter how disgusting - it was German
land? And yet this end? Not one more force that
guarantees us victory?
Open your hearts! He who wants to see, sees!
The power is there, from which the night flees!"⁴³

It is understandable that the Nazi historiography elevates Eckart to the heights as a party poet in the face of such pompous adulation. However, this is not without piquancy: Eckart was never a registered party member - at least even historians of the Third Reich have never been able to prove that he was a member. The writer's tendency to be a loner probably prevented him from giving up his intellectual independence in favor of a group. This was no reason for Hitler to hold his poet friend with the good connections in low esteem. On the contrary: the propagandist had every reason to be grateful to his friend Eckart. Since Hitler's departure from the army in the spring of 1920, the veteran has been without a job and without a steady income. Hitler bragged that he was forgoing a salary from the party. He allegedly lived off fees for his speaking appearances and occasional articles, he claimed. However, as Hitler was beating the drum exclusively for the Nazi Party, the money from such activities was likely to be more than modest. This soon led to rumors within the NSDAP, which were articulated in an anonymous flyer: "When asked by individual members what he actually did for a living and what profession he used to have, he always became angry and agitated. These questions have still not been answered. His conscience can therefore not be clear, especially as his excessive womanizing, during which he often referred to himself as the 'King of Munich'

There is an explanation for some of Hitler's private income, which came to light in connection with a police investigation in 1922, when Hitler was sentenced to three months in prison for breach of the peace - he had used violence to break up an anti-government rally. A statement from search department IVa of the Munich police headquarters on February 6 reads: "Hitler has no family members, he is completely single and lives in after-rent, he has no assets. Since October 1921, he has been an employee of Dietrich Eckart's Hohen-Eichen publishing house with a monthly salary of 1,500 marks. He receives no income from the party."⁴⁵ His poet friend, who had founded the publishing house as the basis for his magazine "Auf gut deutsch", provided the Nazi functionary with a comfortable living. This meant he could live comfortably without a job. Eckart provides further income: He initiated a business relationship that proved to be extremely lucrative for both sides until the end of the Third Reich: between Hitler and the photographer Heinrich Hoffmann. The photographer had his studio at Schellingstrasse 50 in Schwabing, just opposite the printing works of the "Völkischer Beobachter". At the end of October 1922, he received an offer from a US photo agency to obtain a picture of Hitler - for the exorbitant sum of 100 US dollars. By way of comparison, a photo of Reich President Ebert cost only five dollars. For tactical reasons, Hitler had previously refused to be photographed. Hoffmann therefore turns to Eckart. He tried to sell his foster son at an even higher price: "If someone wants a photo of Hitler, they don't have to pay 100 or 1,000 dollars, but 30,000 dollars."⁴⁶

Of course, this was a shameless exaggeration. But Eckart lobbied the Nazi party leader for Hoffmann as a party member - and in the years leading up to the collapse in 1945, Hoffmann remained Hitler's court photographer. Hitler received a commission of 10 percent for the exclusive rights to the photographs.⁴⁷ This quickly paid off: one of Hoffmann's photo books on the revolution in Bavaria alone, for example, brought in a profit of half a million marks.⁴⁸ Hitler was a regular guest at the Hoffmanns', where he also met the photographic assistant Eva Braun, whom he married in the Führerbunker in the last days of his life in 1945 and with whom he subsequently committed suicide together.

Eckart is prepared to step into the breach even for small sums of money. In the fall of 1922, the NSDAP was able to use its own trucks to transport the SA thugs. Previously, the party had had to rely on borrowing trucks from small business owners who, as party members, made the vehicles available free of charge - an arrangement that involved some organizational effort due to the many deployments and the uncertainty as to whether the trucks could be used.

were actually available on the desired date. Dietrich Eckart helped once again, as the Nazi functionary Christian Weber recounts: "When the Faber company had to start selling trucks in the fall of 1922, I bought two trucks for the party in agreement with Hitler according to the purchase contract. The amount of the down payment was given to me on loan by Dietrich Eckart at the time."⁴⁹

No wonder Hitler's gratitude for his friend was boundless. Eckart was allowed to write the "Sturmlied" for the NSDAP, which the dictator declared the anthem of the movement, and the appeal "Germany awake!" became the Nazis' battle cry. Hitler had the motto embroidered on party flags:

"Storm, storm, storm,
Ring out the bells from tower to tower, Ring
out the men, the old men, the boys, Ring out
the sleepers from their rooms, Ring out the
girls down the stairs, Ring out the mothers
from their cradles, Let them roar and roar the
air, Rush, rush in the thunder of revenge,
Ring out the dead from their tomb,
Germany awake!"⁵⁰

The Germans were later to feel the meaning of these lines in another form - when the sirens announced the storm of new Allied bombing raids during the Second World War.

When NSDAP propaganda leader Adolf Hitler rose to party leader in the summer of 1921, he ruled over around 3,000 party members, a negligible number compared to the established parties, which were also mainly concentrated in the Munich area. The income from membership fees from the 3,000 supporters is also meagre: the monthly fee is 50 pfennigs, which results in a monthly income of 1,500 marks, assuming all comrades pay - which has never been the case in the party's history. The formal, calculable party base is therefore narrow and the corresponding financial cover is thin and full of holes. However, this does not stop the party chairman from realizing his dreams of a right-wing mass movement.

To this end, Hitler relied on forward-looking propaganda. He used speeches, flyers, marches and violent actions by his SA thugs to make people aware of his ideas. But the reach of these methods is limited; even at his speeches at the Krone circus in Munich, the propaganda chief can only reach 3,000, sometimes 5,000 people. He and Eckart recognize this: The NSDAP lacked its own party organ that could act as a multiplier to convey its goals. Their own newspaper with a large circulation

to every corner of the republic. Eckart soberly analyzes the situation: "The parties are beginning to work the people thoroughly. We know how this is done. Through a hurricane of speeches, newspaper articles and leaflets. That costs money. People need to know exactly who will best represent their welfare, and to make that clear to them, you need an expensive

'Agitation'. That brings us happily back to the money."⁵¹ So a newspaper is absolutely necessary as a propaganda weapon. But where to get it - and how to pay for it?

The opportunity presented itself at the end of 1920, when the publishing house Franz Eher Nachf. and its twice-weekly paper "Völkischer Beobachter" ran into financial difficulties - a unique chance for Hitler to seize. The newspaper had a circulation of around 7,000 copies and was well known in right-wing circles - eliminating the risk of having to found a new publication, as there was already an established brand. What's more, the poor publisher costs little. When would such a bargain present itself again? The publicist Karl Graf von Bothmer, a supporter of a separatist Bavaria, also recognizes the buying opportunity and wants to strike. The dream is within his grasp - and yet it threatens to slip between Hitler's fingers. He is getting nervous, time is running out. Then Dietrich Eckart enters the scene.

The poet uses his connection to the Thule Society. This association is the gateway to the "Völkischer Beobachter". This has a history: the society, named after the legendary place Thule, seat of the lost primordial empire of the Aryans, serves as a cover organization for right-wing ethnic groups. Garnished with all kinds of occult and esoteric frills and registered as an association "for the cultivation of German spirituality and German art", Thule forms the core of the violent right-wing counter-revolution against the Munich Soviet Republic, a rallying point for all haters of democracy. Its founder was the shady Rudolf Baron von Sebottendorff, whose real name was Adam Alfred Rudolf Glauer, born in 1875 in Hoyerswerda, Saxony, the son of a locomotive driver. The baron used a swastika as the symbol of his association, which quickly attracted prominent right-wing figures after the First World War: for example, the Walter Spiel brothers, owners of Munich's luxury hotel "Vier Jahreszeiten", where the Thule Society had its club rooms, Rudolf Hess, who later became Hitler's deputy, and Hans Frank, Governor General of Poland during the Second World War and executed as a war criminal in 1946. Regular guests include Alfred Rosenberg, Gottfried Feder and Anton Drexler - and Dietrich Eckart. He knew most of his cronies in the Thule organization and used these contacts to later win the contract for Hitler.

In 1918, Sebottendorff buys the "Münchener Beobachter" for propaganda purposes for the Thule, which he later renames the "Völkischer Beobachter". Two years later, business was going badly and the publishing house was converted into a limited liability company with share capital of 120,000 marks. The shareholders in March 1920 are

Käthe Bierbaumer, Freiburg/Breisgau	46,500 marks
Franz Freiherr v. Feilitzsch, Munich	20,000 marks
Gottfried Feder, Dipl.-Ing., Munich	10,000 marks
Franz Xaver Eder, Munich	10,000 marks
Dr. Wilhelm Gutberlet, physician,	10,000 marks
Munich Theodor Heuss, factory owner,	10,000 marks
Munich Dora Kunze, Lauban	10,000 marks
Karl Alfred Braun, Munich	3 500 Marks ⁵²

This is the starting point for Eckart's efforts to purchase the property. The main shareholder, Käthe Bierbaumer, was Sebottendorff's lover and patron, and Dora Kunze was his sister. Three proven Nazis are also involved: Gutberlet and Eckart's friends Heuss and Feder. Although the three people only held a quarter of the capital at 30,000 marks, they would vote in favor of an NSDAP buyer and, in case of doubt, serve as effective

brakes on other interested parties. When the time for the sale crystallized in mid-December due to the threat of bankruptcy, the Nazi propaganda leader Hitler faced another hurdle: Where to find the money? Because the party coffers were empty.

Once again, Eckart succeeds in making the decisive move. The total purchase price amounted to 120,000 marks plus the assumption of 250,000 marks in debt, meaning that the deal had a de facto volume of 370,000 marks. As the party had no assets worth mentioning, the takeover of the publishing house had to be financed with loans. And pumping other people has been Eckart's specialty since his Berlin years.

But time passes without any tangible success. Panic sets in for Hitler. On the night of December 16-17, 1920, he arrives excitedly at 2 a.m. at the home of NSDAP chairman Anton Drexler. He gets his mother out of bed to make coffee for the guest and serve the freshly baked Rohrnudeln. But Hitler was impatient and insisted that the party chairman "go to Eckart early in the morning and tell him to go with me to well-funded people to get money to buy the 'Beobachter'," Drexler recalls. He continues: "The next morning, I was at Dietrich Eckart's at 8 o'clock in the morning, and he scolded me terribly for coming so early. I then drove off with Eckart."⁵³ The brown poet used his connections and sought out Franz Ritter von Epp, a lieutenant general in the Reichswehr. The officer sympathized with the Nazi party and, what was decisive

access to a Reichswehr fund, a kind of slush fund for special occasions. Eckart is able to persuade von Epp to grant him a loan of 60,000 marks. The writer guarantees this with his personal assets and gives the officer a personal promissory bill. The NSDAP member Dr. Gottfried Grandei, owner of a factory for spices and cooking oil in Augsburg, paid a further 56,500 marks. Eckart had known him since his move to Munich; at Christmas 1919, the playwright had given Grandei a copy of "Peer Gynt" as a gift.

That's all the money. The NSDAP had already elegantly solved another problem: as the party is not a legal entity, it cannot carry out legal transactions and therefore cannot buy a newspaper. For this reason, the "National Socialist German Workers' Association" was founded in October 1920, headed by party chairman Drexler and later Hitler. In principle, founding an association is the same method that parties use today to ensure a flow of donations. On December 17, 1920 at 4 p.m., the time had come: Drexler, as legal representative, had the NS association registered as the new 100 percent owner at the registry court of the Munich district court. Hitler is beside himself with joy. One day later, he writes an exuberant letter of thanks to Eckart:

"Munich, December 18, 20

Mr. Dietrich Eckart Munich

Dear Mr. Eckart!

Now that the 'Völkischer Beobachter' has finally been handed over to the party, I would like to take this opportunity to express my warmest thanks to you, Mr. Eckart, for the great help you gave us at the last minute.

Without your helpful intervention, things would probably not have turned out as they did, and I believe that we would have lost the best chance of winning our own newspaper for many months to come. I myself am now attached to the movement with heart and soul, so you can hardly imagine how happy I am to have achieved this much longed-for goal and how much I feel the urge to express my deep gratitude to you for this happiness today.

In faithful veneration

Yours, A. Hitler"⁵⁴

When the propaganda leader became NSDAP chairman in the summer of 1921, he thanked Dietrich Eckart by appointing him editor-in-chief of the "Völkischer Beobachter". The poet quickly turns the newspaper

the "fighting paper of the movement". In November 1921, Hitler has the shares in Eher-Verlag transferred to himself as legal representative, and in April 1922 his former sergeant Max Amann takes over the management of the publishing house. But the difficulties for Hitler only began with the purchase of the newspaper. Although Eckart was able to raise the funds for the takeover, the running costs for the paper, which was published twice a week and daily from February 1923, regularly exceeded the young party's normal financial capacity. In his commercial naivety, Hitler had not calculated the weekly costs of editorial offices, staff, paper and printing. As a result, the publishing house was repeatedly hit by serious financial crises that threatened the publication of the newspaper. The Nazi leader tries to open up further sources of income by selling promissory bills to party members, appealing for donations and offering a press bonus of 50 pfennigs per membership fee. But that was nowhere near enough. Eckart has to step in again.

The writer tracks down the printing company owner Adolf Müller, a shrewd entrepreneur who offers low prices, but who, despite his NSDAP membership, acts according to the simple motto: "Where there is no payment, there is no printing!" According to Hitler, the printing costs alone amounted to a total of 14 to 20 million marks by the time he came to power in 1933.⁵⁵ To keep the day-to-day business running, Eckart repeatedly dipped into his private coffers and borrowed money from his acquaintances. The poet gained a friend from his Berlin days as a regular patron and collector of money: Dr. Emil Gansser. On Eckart's initiative, he provided Hitler with new donors and valuable contacts.

The Nazi supporter Gansser cultivated a distinguished appearance, usually wearing a white shirt, starched collar and a black skirt with striped trousers. Born in Bregenz on Lake Constance in 1874, the son of a Protestant pastor, he studied chemistry, pharmacy and medicine, called himself a "private scholar" and from 1911 worked as an inventor and freelance broker and acquirer of orders for Siemens & Halske in Berlin. This work for the company predestined Gansser to serve the NSDAP due to his business connections and experience in dealing with customers. When Eckart was promoted to editor-in-chief in August 1921, he wrote to his friend asking for his help. The letter to Gansser also sheds light on the flattery and exaggerations with a sense of drama with which the poet approached his friends for financial support:

"With the fundraising, it doesn't want to go forward at all. I really don't know whether I won't be able to publish the 'Beobachter' when I officially take it over on August 12.

I will have to let the company go bankrupt immediately, which would of course be a terrible embarrassment for me too. I wrote to Mr. Frank about this in detail several days ago in Berlin, but have not yet received a reply. I wonder if he hasn't returned from Switzerland yet? Would you not be so kind as to go and see him as soon as possible? There is a lot at stake for our otherwise so brilliant movement. If the 'Observer' falls out. I must get a large sum of money from somewhere these days; otherwise I can't go any further with the best will in the world. Under certain circumstances I would come to Berlin again immediately. Do your best, dear friend! And telegraph me if anything gets rolling."⁵⁶

Eckart showed no inhibitions in bombarding Gansser and all his acquaintances with further demands and requests for money. Just three months later, he telegraphs to his friend: "Without the most immediate contribution of any kind, the paper will be finished the day after tomorrow."⁵⁷ Eckart always manages to raise the necessary sums for the next issues at the last minute - the paper never has to interrupt its publication rhythm because of this. He constantly had appeals printed in the "Völkischer Beobachter" in which he appealed to the readers' national sentiment and asked them to contribute to the newspaper's continued existence with donations. However, Eckart's lax handling of money led to chaotic conditions and Hitler's constant concern about the timely publication of his propaganda tool: "I would never have handed Dietrich Eckart the management of a large newspaper, it would have had a financial administration that would have been in his vest pocket; one time the paper would have appeared, another time it wouldn't"⁵⁸, he later recalled. The poet's organizational confusion finally led to his dismissal as editor-in-chief in spring 1923; Hitler entrusted Alfred Rosenberg as the new number one of the "Völkischer Beobachter" instead. Another letter from Eckart to his friend Ganser from August 1922 shows just how much the finances were in disarray:

"About three weeks ago, I had Amann give me 20,000 marks to partially cover the 25,000 marks borrowed from Wuz for a printer's bill ('Beobachter'). Now Wuz told me at the time that he didn't need the money yet, so I kept the 20,000 marks back, or rather I gave you the 3,000 marks, Mrs. Vogel 2,000 and recently our honorary chairman Drexler 5,000, because he wants to give me securities soon. I kept the rest of the 10,000 marks for myself for lack of any income and of course I needed quite a lot of it. Now comes the unpleasant part. At the last meeting, Wuz told me that he needed the 25,000 marks by next Wednesday. What to do? I think there's that much in the 'Beobachter' cash box (postal checking account).

Talk to Hitler immediately. I have around 50,000 marks in personal outstanding debts, which are all due in the course of this month. As soon as I have collected them, I will of course be there to cover the 25,000 marks."⁵⁹Eckart can rely on the enterprising Gansser. At the end of May 1922, he organized an appearance by the Bavarian local great Hitler at the National Club in Berlin. This club recruited its members from circles of entrepreneurs, bankers, large landowners, officers and professors. This was the NSDAP leader's first important appearance outside of Munich in front of an influential financial elite. Hitler's courtship of the powerful men in the National Club bears fruit: he succeeds in winning Ernst von Borsig as a supporter - a resonant name at the time, after all, von Borsig owns a lorry factory and is a member of various business associations. Borsig's private secretary Dr. Fritz Detert attended the meeting on behalf of his employer and reported his impressions: "This report turned out like this," Detert later wrote to Borsig's son, "that your father personally went to the second lecture that Adolf Hitler gave at the National Club to get to know him. Your father was so moved by the experience of that evening that he instructed me to contact Adolf Hitler directly, without intermediaries, and to talk to him about how and by what means the movement, which at that time was still almost exclusively limited to southern Germany, especially Bavaria, could be extended to northern Germany, especially Berlin."⁶⁰Detert soon met with Hitler in what was then the "Rheingold" in Potsdamer Strasse, and the two discussed plans for a Berlin office and the necessary funding. Von Borsig also collects donations from industrialist friends and delivers the money to the NSDAP leader in Munich through intermediaries.⁶¹

Sitting in the Berlin auditorium was another person whose acquaintance would soon pay off for Hitler: Privy Councillor of Commerce Hermann Aust, managing director of a Munich malt coffee company and honorary member of the presidium of the Bavarian Industrialists' Association. The businessman was so impressed by the party leader that he organized several meetings between Hitler and Bavarian industrialists: On one occasion, the Nazi leader explained his goals in the office of the association's counsel Dr. Alfred Kuhlo, Aust's son-in-law. Other guests included Anton von Rieppel, General Director of the MAN Group, and businessman Dr. Nöll. Aust arranged another appearance by Hitler with an extended circle at the elite "Herrenclub" in Munich and arranged a speech by the Nazi leader at the Kaufmannskasino in front of a large number of businessmen. The financial success was immediate, as Aust later proved to the police.

The recognition was expressed in the fact that some gentlemen, who were already personally acquainted with Hitler, gave me donations for his movement with the request that they be given to Hitler. I cannot remember the individual amounts or the total sum. I cannot easily remember the individual personalities of the donors. I seem to remember that Swiss francs were among the donations that passed through my hand."⁶²Aust's conspicuous loss of memory regarding some important facts has certain similarities with the memory gaps of today's politicians and entrepreneurs when it comes to their party splinter affairs. In any case, the consequences of Emil Gansser's organizational talent had a beneficial effect on the party coffers.

Eckart's tireless friend opens up further sources of money for Hitler in Switzerland. Gansser traveled to Zurich, Wintherthur and Basel several times in 1923, writing advertising letters to entrepreneurs and well-off citizens in order to raise donations. He also prepares Hitler's trip to Switzerland in the same year, and the party chairman holds meetings with business people in Zurich and Bern. Hitler's ranting about his young national movement and his anti-Semitism fell on fertile ground: According to police investigations, the trips result in donations of 33,000 Swiss francs for the NSDAP.⁶³Hitler can put the hard currency to good use in the times of German hyperinflation - he uses the cash to pay the salaries of his SA officials; they even benefit from the currency devaluation because their wages are worth more every day. Hermann Kriebel, for example, military head of the German Combat League, received 200 Swiss francs a month, while subordinate SA leaders received between 80 and 90 francs a month.

Dietrich Eckart also lays the foundation for another foreign contact that brings in the coveted foreign currencies. In 1919, he met Warren C. Anderson, who worked as the European representative of the American car manufacturer Ford. Eckart's tirades of hatred against the Jews fell on fertile ground with the manager: The company boss Henry Ford is a self-confessed anti-Semite who incites hatred in his newspaper "Dearborn Independent" with articles such as "The International Jew: The Problem of the World". The first sentence reads: "There is a race, a part of humanity, which has never been accepted as a welcome part."⁶⁴For the CEO, the Jews are to blame for the decline of the United States and the misfortune of the world. Ford writes the book "The International Jew", which is published in German in 1920 under the title "Der ewige Jude". Eckart is able to raise money from the Americans for the young Nazi Party; the Social Democrat Erhard Auer, Vice President of the Bavarian State Parliament, writes about this in a report to the Reich President and party comrade Ebert:

"The Bavarian state parliament has long had information that the Hitler movement is financed in part by an American anti-Semitic leader, Henry Ford. Ford's interest in the Bavarian anti-Semitic movement began a year ago when a Ford representative who wanted to sell tractors contacted the notorious All-German Dietrich Eichart (*meaning Eckart*). Shortly thereafter, Mr. Eichart asked Ford's representative for financial assistance. The representative returned to America and immediately afterwards Henry Ford's money began to arrive in Munich. Mr. Hitler openly boasted of Ford's support and praised Ford as a great individual and a great anti-Semite. A photograph of Ford hangs in Hitler's office."⁶⁵The contacts continue in the following years. Siegfried and Winifred Wagner, whose connection to Hitler was established by Eckart, met Henry Ford at a private invitation during a concert tour in the United States. Winifred remembers the conversation: "Ford told me that he had contributed to Hitler's financial support with the proceeds from the sale of automobiles and trucks that he had sent to Germany."⁶⁶The admirer of the Nazi leader lobbied the US industrialist for further support for the Nazi movement. Hitler returned the favor to Henry Ford in July 1938 and awarded him the Grand Cross of the Order of the German Eagle on his 75th birthday - the first American and fourth foreigner ever to do so.

Eckart made a name for himself with Hitler not only through his excellent contacts to financial backers, but also through his anti-Semitism and his crude attacks on his political opponents. The attacks earned the poet a series of court cases. Things got really serious in the spring of 1923 when Eckart insulted Reich President Ebert in a publication, who then pressed charges. After the writer fails to appear at the court hearing, the State Court of the German Reich in Leipzig issues a prison sentence against Eckart. He has no intention of facing justice. Instead, with Hitler's help, he hides in the mountains of Berchtesgaden. He rents a room in the "Platterhof" on the Obersalzberg with the Büchner family. The NSDAP chairman visits him in the Alps for a long time. Hitler describes the welcome scene as follows: "We knock on a door. Diedi, the wolf is here! He comes out in his nightgown with his spiky legs. Greetings. He was very touched. Eckart introduced me to Büchner: This is my young friend, Mr. Wolf! No one had any idea that I was identical to the infamous Adolf Hitler. Eckart was there as Dr. Hoffmann."⁶⁷The Nazi dictator not only enjoyed these teasing hide-and-seek games, but even more so the landscape. A few years later, he buys a property on the



Hitler salute at the grave of Dietrich Eckart

Obersalzberg, which he then had converted into the "Berghof" and which became his favorite summer residence.

Eckart's vacation in the mountains also serves as a cure. The 55-year-old is increasingly feeling the effects of his years of drug and alcohol consumption. His health is failing. The writer begins to write a new anti-Semitic work entitled "Bolshevism from Moses to Lenin - Dialogues between Adolf Hitler and me". He shows the book to his friend Gansser during a visit, but meets with little enthusiasm: "When I read it to him, he fell asleep so and so often." The political situation calmed down and there no longer seemed to be any threat of legal persecution; Eckart returned to Munich at the end of October 1923. On November 7, in the midst of the coup rumors, he met with his friend Albert Reich in a wine bar in Baerstrasse and prophesied: "And may it be so, and may it come as it will and must; but I believe in Hitler, a star hovers over him."⁶⁸ Eckart only experienced the Hitler coup on November 9, when he and Alfred Rosenberg accompanied Hitler and Ludendorff's demonstration procession for a short distance by car. The poet only found out about the miserable finale with the shoot-out at the Feldherrnhalle afterwards. Although he was not actively involved in the preparations for the putsch, State Commissioner General von Kahr had him taken into protective custody as a known friend of Hitler and sent to Munich prison.

delheim. Eckart's world collapses. His political struggle seemed to be forever in vain: The hoped-for uprising of the citizens against the hated government failed to materialize, and his idol Hitler was threatened with a long prison sentence for high treason. He vented all his frustration in the poem he wrote on paper in cell 304 on November 21:

"Stupid people! You reviled everyone who faithfully labored for you, With blasphemous speeches you also rewarded Hitler's kindness, Grunt test, when the Pharisees forced him down from behind. But now the Hebrew is coming, your messenger has gone! Lashes around your ears, Not to forget your mouth - Born for the slave yoke, You only think of eating! Thank God, what Hitler planned was ever cut off, And he was spared the shame of having liberated you, you pack!"⁶⁹

Eckart's depression was exacerbated by the prison conditions. "I had to undress stark naked in a cold room, was examined for vermin, was then allowed to get dressed again and was immediately put in a barely heated cell. Sick as I am, I froze significantly"⁷⁰, Eckart laments in a letter of supplication to von Kahr, in which he asks his political opponent for clemency and early release. For the time being, the poet was transferred to Hitler at Landsberg Fortress, but was released on December 20. But now the grueling work for the Nazi movement finally takes its physical toll. On Christmas Eve, Eckart returns to the mountains of Berchtesgaden, to the "Sonnenblick" house. There he breathes his last in solitude on December 26, 1923 - while his friend Hitler awaits his trial in Landsberg. One last dramatic coincidence: his childhood friend, senior medical officer Dr. Kressler, lived nearby, he examined the body and wrote out the death certificate - heart failure - with the comment: "A lost man has just died"⁽⁷¹⁾.

Eckart's wife did not get to see her divorced husband for the last few months before his death. After his arrest, she tried to get permission to visit him in prison - in vain. After coming to power

In 1933, Hitler paid homage to his fellow fighter from the early days with a number of honors. The dictator unveiled memorials to Eckart, erected a bronze bust of his friend at the Munich NSDAP headquarters and dined in the "Führer Square" under the poet's picture. When the "Frankfurter Zeitung" dared to print a critical article about the poet in 1943, Hitler took the report as an opportunity to have the paper closed down for good. Several Dietrich Eckart stages were established, a Dietrich Eckart Foundation was set up and the Reclam publishing house and the city of Hamburg awarded Dietrich Eckart prizes for literature. The theaters take his dusty plays out of the drawer and stage several new productions and premieres. But the enthusiasm decreed from above does not infect ordinary people: The dramas and comedies fall through with the audience, the empty auditoriums force the performances to be canceled again - and this time the curtain falls for good.

MAX ERWIN VON SCHEUBNER-RICHTER



The friend of the tsar

He was considered a shadowy figure, a phantom to his contemporaries, barely visible and yet always present in the background. For Hitler, however, he was one of the most important fundraisers and door openers. The public only became aware of him in the autumn of 1923, when rumors of a coup against the government began to circulate. "Who is this man?" asked the "Bayerischer Kurier" in its issue of October 5, 1923. "Is this the same Dr. von Scheubner-Richter who gave guest roles here in East Prussia and who claimed to have served as a Bavarian heavy cavalry officer?" The newspaper puzzles over whether this Scheubner-Richter is an "alleged Cossack leader in Persia" or whether he has "great political missions to accomplish". "This much is certain, that Dr. von Scheubner-Richter is not a Bavarian, a Baltic (German Russian) and that he only enjoys hospitality in Bavaria," the paper continues. "We don't envy the growth of Hitler's guard."

Such speculations and assumptions accompanied the graduate engineer Dr. Max Erwin von Scheubner-Richter throughout his life. This enigmatic figure from the early days of the Nazi movement only came into the spotlight in 1923 and thus became visible to a wider circle. Scheubner-Richter had already met Hitler in Munich in October 1920 and subsequently attended meetings of the propaganda speaker with his wife Mathilde, who would not formally seize power in the party as dictatorial first chairman until nine months later. The engineering graduate was impressed:

Scheubner-Richter joins the NSDAP as early as November 22. He was given the membership number 2414.

The new party comrade, 36 years old at the time, five years older than Hitler, works with zeal for the future party leader. Scheubner-Richter explains his conviction and admiration as follows: "There must be National Socialists with and without stand-up collars. I opted for the one without the stand-up collar."¹ He is small in stature, his brown eyes behind rimless glasses give him an intellectual air. This impression is reinforced by his large-looking skull, which Scheubner-Richter keeps shaved, and a narrow moustache. Friends describe him as a gentleman and a man of the world, a diplomat with a cultivated manner. He has an amiable and suggestive effect on his interlocutors, negotiates skillfully and knows how to win people over. A talent that he often uses successfully to raise money - also to his own advantage. He speaks with an unmistakable Russian accent, which betrays the man's origins. This bond with his homeland in the Baltic states, the Baltic provinces of the Tsarist empire, captivated Scheubner-Richter until his early death during the Hitler putsch in November 1923 and drove him to political action throughout his life.

As a border crosser between two worlds, as a bohemian and a brown revolutionary, he ultimately ended up in the fold of the newly founded NSDAP. There, Scheubner-Richter developed his skills as a "genius in raising funds"², as the historian Walter Laqueur notes. For Werner Maser, the enterprising Balte was "one of the most important middlemen between Hitler and some of his financial backers".³ The first Hitler biographer, Konrad Heiden, even characterized Scheubner-Richter as the "Führer's Führer" in 1936. This judgment is certainly exaggerated, as it underestimates Hitler's unalterable will to power. However, it reflects the importance of this man in the early days of the Nazi Party. Hitler himself said after the death of his discreet aide in 1923: "Everyone is replaceable, except one: Scheubner-Richter!"⁴ The Baltic had earned this recognition from Hitler's mouth by tapping into financial sources from Russian friends of the tsars and from radical right-wing circles around General Erich Ludendorff. Scheubner-Richter benefited from his tactical skills or, as his friend Otto von Kursell, a portrait painter, called it, "his art of treating people".⁵ His proximity to the leader of the brown party earned him enemies early on. Ernst Hanfstaengl, son of a family of art publishers and a member of Hitler's inner circle, dubbed him a "man of undoubted talent, but with a rather dubious past".⁶ Party friends spread the rumor that Scheubner-Richter was an Eastern Jew. This infuriates the man concerned: he declares in the "Völkischer Beobachter" that he will pay 100 dollars to anyone who can prove his Jewish ancestry.⁷

Scheubner-Richter's winding path through life does indeed give rise to speculation. He was born on January 21, 1884 in the Russian governorate of Riga. His father Karl Friedrich Richter came from Saxony. Karl Friedrich was working as a music teacher in Riga when he met his future wife Justine Hauswald, the daughter of the engineer and factory owner Gottlob Hauswald. Max Erwin grew up in a wealthy household, his parents raised their son in the Evangelical-Lutheran faith - the offspring retained an abstract religiousness throughout his life, even when he was active in the anti-clerical Nazi party. His father died when Max was six years old. His mother now has to support her son alone, which is perhaps why she sends him to school in the Estonian city of Reval, where Max lives and graduates from high school.

Back in Riga, he enrolled at the Technical University and studied chemistry. At this time, he still called himself a judge; he would only later add the title of Scheubner to his name. He joins the Rubonia student fraternity, whose corps brothers regularly meet in an old tower with sashes and caps and celebrate the usual drinking bouts. This wouldn't be anything remarkable in itself if this fraternity hadn't coincidentally brought together some men who would later make careers in the Third Reich: There was Richter's friend Alfred Rosenberg, son of an Estonian mother and a Latvian father. After the revolution of 1917, he fled first to Paris, then to Munich. As early as 1919, he joined the German Workers' Party, the forerunner of the NSDAP. As the main editor of the "Völkischer Beobachter", he entered Hitler's service and acquired the status of party philosopher in the 1920s. Rosenberg agitated against the "Jewish-Masonic world conspiracy", called for an "awakening of the racial soul" and fought against "degenerate art". From 1933 to 1945, he was head of the foreign policy office of the Nazi DAP, and in 1941 he was also Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories. Rosenberg was convicted as a war criminal in Nuremberg and hanged on October 16, 1946. Rubonia member Arno Schickedanz wrote inflammatory writings such as the book "Der Sozialparasitismus im Völkerleben" (Social Parasitism in the Life of Nations), published in 1928, and became Rosenberg's right-hand man at the "Völkischer Beobachter" and in the administration of the occupied territories. Schickedanz committed suicide in 1945. And Max Richter's school friend and corps comrade Otto von Kursell, who later lived as a portrait painter in Munich and distinguished himself with his disfiguring caricatures of Jews, also became politically active after the National Socialists seized power: after 1933 he became a ministerial councillor in the Reich Ministry of Science, and from 1938 he sat in the Reichstag. In 1945, the Soviet occupying forces arrested him and sent him to a labor camp for five years. So far, there is nothing to suggest any unusual twists and turns in Max Erwin Richter's life.

A dazzling career in the Tsarist Empire after graduation seemed certain. But the year 1905 changed everything for the 21-year-old student. The first Russian revolution breaks out: Workers and peasants rise up, protest against social injustice and turn against the authorities. For in the Baltic states, as everywhere else in Russia, a feudal order prevailed. At its head was the tsar, below him the aristocracy, the middle classes and then the proletariat. A strict corporative state that places rule in the hands of a few. The Russian subjects of German descent are considered privileged: they are large landowners or work as pastors, civil servants and, like Max's father, as private tutors. The historical roots of the German minority in the Russian Baltic provinces go back to the time of the Hanseatic League. Over the centuries, the people have preserved the traditions and characteristics of their old homeland - and yet they are still subjects of the tsar.

The revolutionary Social Democrats soon appear in the provinces and in Riga. They organize strikes, plunder 200 German manor houses and pastorates and burn them down. A shock for the Baltic Germans: the appearance of the armed and violent groups must have acted as a signal for civil war. The anger of the insurgents towards the medieval feudal order is vividly described by the Baltic German politician Paul Schiemann: "Anyone who has ever been to a Baltic manor before the revolution will remember the almost god-like position of the 'gracious grand lord', against whom not only the servant but also the free peasant who kissed the sleeve of the lords was a complete nothing."⁸

Max Erwin Richter does what many of his fellow students do: He takes up arms and joins a Tsarist Cossack regiment and the "German-Baltic Self-Defense". The troops guard farms and factories. There are clashes with the Revolutionary Guards and Richter is injured in the knee by a shot, which means that the authorities later write him up as unfit for military service. While protecting a factory in Riga, the student meets Mathilde Mündel, the daughter of factory owner Otto von Scheubner. It was a fateful encounter for the 21-year-old, which led to his involuntary departure for Munich.

The student openly courts the woman - and causes a scandal in Riga's conservative upper-class society. Mathilde, known as Hilda, is already married. And at the time, it was considered disreputable and completely unacceptable to take a wife away from her husband. But there was another fact that caused friends and acquaintances to shake their heads: Mathilde was already 50 years old at the time, making her 29 years older than Max Erwin Richter. Such a liaison was unheard of shortly after the turn of the century, according to the usual

It is unthinkable in the so-called better society, which prides itself on its supposed intellectual and moral superiority. One can imagine the many implorations from friends to the young man and the woman to put the thought of such a relationship out of their minds, the disparaging looks when they meet in public, the whispers from neighbors and acquaintances: The young man could be her son after all! What it looks like when the two of them go out together! What is a woman of her age actually thinking? But all this external pressure doesn't stop them from going ahead with their plan. Hilda von Scheubner divorces her husband and marries Max Erwin Richter. As acquaintances cut her off and many treat her like a leper, the two soon escape the mental confines of the German-Baltic enclave and move to the Bavarian capital. What sounds like a romantic love story was in reality a pro-fan business. It reveals some of Max Erwin's character traits. Hilda may also have been captivated by the charm of the young cavalier, longing to break out of her previous life and throw herself into an adventure. She may have been filled with pride at owning the handsome young man with his polite, polished manner. But this was not a normal marriage. And not only because Hilda was of course unable to have children at her age - when at the beginning of the 20th century, starting a family was a natural part of every marriage. But for Max Erwin, the word love did not occur in this relationship. Friends describe the relationship as amicable and correct. Max's buddy Otto von Kursell carefully formulated it as follows: "His marriage to Mathilde was a firm companionship that stood the test of time in good times and in critical times, right up to his death." Kursell sees the marital bond as being forged more by "the unanimity of views", by their shared hobbies of mountaineering and horse riding. But deep feelings of affection, let alone love, are absent. In the years that followed, Hilda had to live with the fact that her husband often left her alone at home for months on end when he volunteered for the war and went to the front, or when he went on one of his many conspiratorial trips.

For Max Erwin Richter, marrying a woman 29 years his senior has tangible benefits: He comes into possession of a fortune that will allow him to live without the need for steady work in the future. At the same time, he already shows his skill at tapping into other sources of money: He manages to get the childless Klara von Scheubner, a close relative of his wife Mathilde, to adopt him. The noblewoman becomes Max Erwin's new adoptive mother. His biological mother Justine Richter was still alive at the time and did not die until 1917 in Munich.

to the other. This move brought Max Erwin two advantages: The Richter couple can now use the title "von Scheubner", which Max prefixes to his name. And Max Erwin von Scheubner-Richter inherits the lavish estates of his namesake. This enabled him to easily finance a life of prosperity and he was never again dependent on other people's money. This later earned him the status of a particularly reliable supporter of Hitler, as there was little danger of Scheubner-Richter diverting some of the money he raised into his own pocket, as other party supporters did.

In Munich, the newly minted aristocrat finished his chemistry studies at the Technical University. The university is only a few meters away from Gabelsberger Strasse, where a certain Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, better known as Lenin, had lived a few years earlier. The Russian professional revolutionary would later become Scheubner-Richter's mortal enemy as the epitome of Bolshevism, especially after the 1917 revolution, as the Baltic German channeled his own negative experiences with the Russian insurgents and the resulting final loss of his homeland into a fanatical fight against the communists, who in his eyes were the downfall of Russia and the Tsarist empire. On the other hand, Scheubner-Richter copied some of Lenin's methods, which he put into practice during the Hitler putsch.

At the same time as the chemistry student, another Russian was living in Schwabing, who would later become famous as a painter revolutionary and founder of abstract painting: Wassily Kandinsky. The artist also had ties to Scheubner-Richter's homeland: Kandinsky's grandmother was from Baltin and she talked to him a lot in German during his childhood. It is not known whether Scheubner-Richter and Kandinsky met at the numerous events organized by the Russian colony in Munich. The contrast could hardly have been greater: On the one hand, a politically staunch right-wing friend of the tsar with military ambitions, on the other, a free spirit who enjoyed his unbound life and detested anything conservative.

Although he was not actually required to join the army due to his previous injury, Scheubner-Richter volunteered for the

7th Royal Bavarian Chevauxlegers Regiment in Straubing, in the 3rd squadron under cavalry captain Count Preysing. He sent him to the Turkish city of Erzerum (now Erzurum) south of the Black Sea on a half-military, half-political assignment. There he worked with the title of vice-consul as a liaison to the Turkish allies' war ministry.

As a dignitary, Scheubner-Richter enjoyed the comforts of his position.

He employs a personal servant by the name of Tahir, organizes horse games and hunts, builds a wine cellar and invites guests to his house for meals - a diplomatic life in times of war. However, the idyll is soon disturbed: the vice-consul witnesses the Turkish massacre of the Christian Armenian minority, with well over a million people falling victim to the killings. Around Erzerum, the inhabitants drive the Armenian women and children out of their homes, forcing them to leave their villages. They are forced to leave their belongings behind and are not even allowed to travel. The men are abducted and Turks move into the houses instead. They looted and destroyed churches. Scheubner-Richter intervenes with the Turkish authorities: "This large-scale resettlement is tantamount to massacres," he criticizes. "For lack of any means of transportation, hardly half of them will reach their destination."¹⁰ But his appeals fell on deaf ears. In a telegram to his German superior, Scheubner-Richter wrote in frustration: "The government does not want to do anything to protect deportees. Most of the men and children have been murdered, the women stolen."¹¹ The German military remained passive for political reasons and the vice-consul's attempts to save the people came to nothing.

For Scheubner-Richter, this personal experience of death, the daily sight of the corpses of the innocent victims, was formative. Scheubner-Richter will certainly have told Hitler about this experience. And yet Scheubner-Richter's connection to the person who, even then, was already spouting anti-Semitic inflammatory slogans and dark threats, who later initiated the greatest genocide in the history of mankind - who did precisely what the Baltic shunned. Nevertheless, Scheubner-Richter distinguished himself as one of Hitler's early stooges to power. Did the aristocrat unwittingly - or consciously - give the NSDAP leader tips that Hitler later put into practice in the extermination of the Jews? It is surprising that in the last two years of his life, Scheubner-Richter himself was a vocal critic of minorities such as foreigners and Jews, even though he had fought injustice against defenceless population groups just a few years earlier. Apparently, he also succumbed to Hitler's abstruse world view. He wrote in his magazine in Munich

"Aufbau-Korrespondenz" at the beginning of 1923: "Germany and the German nation can only rise from today's disgrace and defenselessness if everything that is to blame for the destruction of the German national body and the failure of the German nation's resistance is first ruthlessly and completely removed from Germany and from the ranks of the Germans. A national united front is conditioned by a ruthless struggle against everything foreign in the German national body. It is conditioned by the ruthless rei

"The aim of Hitler was the unification of Germany from all elements that are hostile to it and that work against the national union of all German tribes."¹²Where was his compassion for his fellow citizens and his advocacy of equal rights? These sentences could have come straight from Hitler's mouth. The change is striking and shows Scheubner-Richter's complete transformation under the influence of the Nazi leader.

In 1916, Scheubner-Richter was stationed in Munich to cure his malaria, which he had contracted on a military expedition. In a letter, he describes the mood in the Bavarian capital: "Munich has become quieter. Many wounded in the streets, which are dominated by the military and the uniform. Civilians are looked at askance, the shirkers are extremely unpopular, almost everything is conscripted. Food issues are the talk of the town, not without strong side-swipes at Berlin. On arrival, I was immediately struck by the firm attitude of the crew."¹³He used his convalescent leave to earn a doctorate in chemistry at the Technical University. His dissertation topic: "On pine hydrobromide and its behavior with silver oxide". In the fall of 1917, the army sent him back to his old homeland: he became head of the press office at the 8th Army High Command in Riga. After Germany's capitulation in November 1918, the envoy August Winnig appoints Scheubner-Richter as provisional head of the German diplomatic mission.

The mood in the city of his birth had changed: Lenin's Bolsheviks held power in their hands, news of strikes, revolution and soldiers' and workers' councils came from Germany. Before the war, over half a million people lived in Riga; after 1910, the population fell to 160,000, 9 percent of whom came from the German upper class. The factory chimneys had stopped smoking, the entrepreneurs had moved to the interior of Russia. Those who could, took their assets to Moscow for safety. At least at this time, the wealthy believed that Moscow was a safe place - a misjudgment, as would soon become apparent.

In January 1919, the Red Army entered Riga. Even before he was sent to the Baltic States, Scheubner-Richter wrote forebodingly about the military uprisings in Russia: "There will definitely be huge upheavals. We Balts will fare worst of all. We will lose one homeland and not gain a new one."¹⁴He was soon to experience this for himself. The spirit of the revolution was also spreading from distant Berlin: The teleprinter reports that the red flag is flying over the Brandenburg Gate. In Riga, the troops form soldiers' councils based on the model of the German and Russian communists. In the eyes of the czar-loyal Diplo-

The Bolsheviks take power and try to turn the Russian Baltic provinces into Soviet republics. And in the German Empire, the monarch has also abdicated, with Bolsheviks also making the streets unsafe. Discipline and order are dissolving for Scheubner-Richter. The last remaining Germans in Riga flee westwards for fear of attacks by the Red Guards.

Despite the chaos and the departure, Scheubner-Richter keeps an overview and does what seems most important to him: he brings the legation's money to safety from the robbers. He develops an imaginative approach to concealing the treasure: the diplomat hides the banknotes in a bucket next to the toilet in a German friend's house. The smell and sight of used toilet paper, he calculates, will deter intruders from looking too closely. He is right.

When Scheubner-Richter tried to abscond himself, he was arrested by German soldiers and taken to the police prison in Alexanderstrasse. The troops are furious, and Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg are murdered in Berlin. In retaliation, the Bolsheviks demand the execution of the German envoy. The insurrectionists reaffirm their intention in street demonstrations. They set up a revolutionary tribunal, which sentenced Scheubner Richter to death. At the last minute, the commander of the Soviet units orders his release. Scheubner-Richter leaves his native city of Riga, this time for good - in his luggage in a butter dish, in a loaf of bread, in a honey jar the banknotes from the hiding place. Via a stopover in Königsberg, he landed in Berlin, his new home in Germany, at the beginning of 1920. The clashes with the communists in Riga, the personal experience of being threatened with death in a cell, the dissolution of the traditional order of rule in Russia - all of this burns in Scheubner-Richter's soul and shapes his further career in Germany. The tsarist grand seigneur and officer became a Bolshevik hater. From then on, he worked for the re-establishment of the monarchy in Russia and wanted a strong Germany that would work with the old forces loyal to Moscow to restore relations. "I am more convinced than ever that there can and will only be two forms of government in Russia: Bolshevism or Tsarism," Scheubner-Richter wrote to his friend Paul Leverkuehn. "Anyone who believes that any social-revolutionary or cadet circles can survive in Russia is on the wrong track."⁽¹⁵⁾ Scheubner-Richter's position is becoming more firmly established: Communism equals Judaism. He wrote in the "Auf- bau-Korrespondenz" that the Soviet government was promoting German communism.

"in order to finally smash national Germany and establish a dictatorship of the proletariat in its place, in this case a dictatorship of Jewish Bolshevism. In Russia, too, the Russian army has not yet realized that it was not created for Russian national interests, but likewise for the international Jewish interests of world domination."¹⁶ A propaganda formula that Hitler varied endlessly - right up to the catastrophe. Scheubner-Richter made it clear what was to happen to the communists: They should be hanged and exterminated.¹⁷

Something else also characterizes Scheubner-Richter: the conflict between the old and new homeland, between loyalty to the Tsar and the German Empire. Many Baltic Germans naturally served in the tsarist army and felt themselves to be subjects of the Russian monarchy - and not only because of their Russian citizenship. At the same time, however, the ethnic Germans cultivated the traditions and customs of their ancestors and separated themselves from the rest of the population in their own associations and societies. The creation of the new republics of Estonia and Latvia put the former upper class of Baltic Germans in the position of a tolerated minority. Their subservience now came across as suspicious and denunciations were the order of the day. The large landowners were expropriated and the Estonians' and Latvians' own nationalism grew stronger. There is no longer any room for the Germans, who feel abandoned by the hesitant attitude of the German government. Scheubner-Richter is also deeply disgraced: degraded from a respected nobleman to an undesirable person in Riga, his way back blocked. At the same time, the Germans treat him and his peers with suspicion: as a native Baltic, he is associated with the wartime enemy Russia and his German patriotism is seen as a pretext. Worse still, he was considered a spy. The Baltic Germans in the German Reich also lived with the fear of being deported as undesirable foreigners.

As much as Scheubner-Richter hates the Bolsheviks, their methods inspire him to imitate them: secrecy, conspiracy and violent overthrow are now part of his repertoire. In an essay entitled "The Red Army - what we can learn from Soviet Russia!" Scheubner-Richter advises readers to study the books of Leon Trotsky. There, she says, everyone can see that success is not achieved in parliament, but only "through military battles and victories". Germany needed a "unifying idea", with which Trotsky successfully motivated his troops.¹⁸ The fight against democracy and parliamentarianism also united Scheubner-Richter with his Russian enemies. As would later become clear, these ideas were not just theory for the Baltic German - he became the driving force behind Hitler's plans for a coup in 1923.

He quickly tried to put the practice of a revolutionary into practice. In March 1920, Scheubner-Richter traveled to Berlin without hesitation to take part in a coup d'état by right-wing military leaders, later known as the Kapp Putsch. Director General Wolfgang Kapp and General Walther Freiherr von Lüttwitz allied themselves with the Ehrhardt naval brigade and attempted to overthrow the Reich government, which had fled to Dresden. Scheubner-Richter is to organize the intelligence service and propaganda in Berlin. The Baltic German starts up a small print shop, but soon realizes that the putschists' preparations are amateurish. A general strike quickly puts an end to the coup attempt and those involved have to flee. Scheubner-Richter ends up back in Munich. There he moves into a stately apartment on the second floor at Widenmayerstrasse 38. The property belongs to the Jewish chemist Lippa Goldstern. Just a few houses away, at Widenmayerstrasse 18, lived another Hitler supporter: Ernst Hanfstaengl. The Baltic German's apartment became a meeting place for various Nazi sympathizers. It was here that Scheubner-Richter arranged the first meeting between the still largely unknown Adolf Hitler and the heir to the company, Fritz Thyssen: This act by the engineer with a doctorate would later bring the NSDAP party chairman an abundant flow of money from Thyssen's coffers.

Scheubner-Richter found an ideal field of activity in Munich. Not only were the most important exiled Russians gathered here, but also representatives of ultra-right-wing movements of all shades, united above all by one desire: away with the hated Berlin Reich government and the peace conditions of Versailles, the resurgence of a militarily powerful Greater Germany with a strong leader at the top. The radicals thrived particularly well in the Munich biotope, as the Bavarian government showed open sympathy for the völkisch movement and the police often remained inactive. Above all, however, the Baltic German found in Adolf Hitler the person who could turn his political dreams into reality. In an article in "Aufbau", Scheubner-Richter justifies his unconditional support for the brown party leader: "Ethnic Germany is ready to take up the fight in faith in the German people, for whom a new prophet has arisen through Adolf Hitler, who has understood how to shake up the German soul and free it from the shackles of Marxist thinking". And further: "The battle will be fought under the slogan 'Here Soviet star - here swastika'. And the swastika will win!"¹⁹

Scheubner-Richter used his organizational and diplomatic talents to raise money for the financially weak NSDAP. There was another reason why he became a valuable supporter of the party leader: "He opened all doors for me"(20).

doors"²⁰, Hitler admitted after Scheubner-Richter's death. Contacts to higher circles were particularly important for the upstart from Braunau, as influence and power were still in the hands of the old elites, who were all recruited from the upper classes. But Hitler only knew a few people there; the vast majority of his members and friends were middle-class people, craftsmen, soldiers and workers.

Scheubner-Richter's ties to the Russian exiles in Munich in particular kept the cash register ringing. To this end, he founded two organizations in 1921 as a contact point and fundraiser: the "Neue Deutsch-Russländische Gesellschaft" and the "Wirtschaftliche Aufbau-Vereinigung". This proved to be a clever move. Because it makes it easier to lure sponsors who are enthusiastic about the idealistic goals of intensifying contacts between Germany and Russia. And who wouldn't be in favor of international understanding - be it political or economic? It is easier for such "non-profit" organizations to make money - which is no different in today's world. Such an institution also proves less suspicious to the police and tax authorities than a private individual. Some people are both clear and critical of this approach. General Alexei von Lampe, representative of the military leader of the inferior Belorussian army led by General Peter Vrangeli, believes that "these are the ideas of a few clever adventurers who are trying to exploit the credulity of some Russian and German circles for their own ends".²¹ Scheubner-Richter is also using a ploy that could have been devised by modern advertising strategists: He uses celebrities as figureheads. They lend his start-ups an aura of special exclusivity and credibility. This seal of quality makes it easier for donors to give their money with a clear conscience. With his charm and persuasiveness, the Baltic German manages to win over big names for his cause: The Bavarian aristocrat Baron Theodor von Cramer-Klett, representative of the Vatican in Bavaria, hereditary Imperial Councillor of the Crown of Bavaria, an ardent monarchist and fascist, worked as president of the Aufbau-Vereinigung. The influential General Vasilij Biskupskij was involved on the Russian side. The members of the German-Russian Society are even more high-profile. In addition to the Bavarian Swabian and linguist Professor Adolf Dirr as the first secretary, the Grand Duchess Viktoria Fedorovna takes over the honorary chairmanship.

An ideal casting: the lady is not only a born Duchess of Coburg-Gotha, but also the wife of Grand Duke Vladimirovic Kirill. And Kirill, in turn, is a cousin of the murdered last Tsar Nikolai II of the House of Romanov and himself claims to be the political heir and legitimate successor to the Tsar.

successor to the tsar. For the Russian emigrants in Bavaria, the fear of the potential heir to the throne can hardly be increased - their loyalty to authority over the office and the person is rooted in the centuries-old social structure. For the German monarchists, looking up to the blue-blooded is also a matter of course. Scheubner-Richter even managed to establish private contacts with the princely couple. He regularly traveled to Coburg to the "Edinbourg" villa, Kirill's residence, where he gave lectures and informed the prince about current political events in the state capital. Scheubner-Richter's wife Mathilde became friends with the Grand Duchess and they went on excursions together - even if the destination was hardly the usual ladies' get-together of the time: they attended SA military exercises in Munich together.

Scheubner-Richter and his Aufbau-Gesellschaft organized a monarchist congress in Bad Reichenhall at the end of May 1921 for the aspirant to the throne and to establish further contacts - in retrospect the most important event of the exiled Russians loyal to the tsar in Germany. The Baltic German strategically chose the Bavarian climatic health resort in the Alps: The town is easy to reach from Munich by train and car, and at the same time there are hardly any disruptive maneuvers to be expected from political opponents. As a precautionary measure, Scheubner-Richter dubbed the meeting the "Congress for the Economic Reconstruction of Russia" and asked for police protection. The request was granted: Police officers cordoned off the congress. After the event, the organizer sent a telegram to the Bavarian Minister President Gustav Ritt von Kahr, asking him to "accept the expression of his deepest gratitude for the opportunity granted to him to gather on Bavarian soil and for the kind courtesy of the Reichenhall authorities".²² On the surface, the meeting of emigrants of all political persuasions served as an attempt to unite and reorganize the divided factions. In practice, however, the meeting was intended to prepare Kirill's claim to the tsarist throne. The Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich, in exile in France, also considered himself the only legitimate heir and demanded his recognition. A decision in favor of one of the candidates is pending. The 106 delegates meet in the "Deutscher Kaiser" hotel. The conference room is decorated in black, yellow and white, the colors of the Romanovs. "Some racy and elegant Russian ladies" stroll along the gallery, as one newspaper smugly notes. Scheubner Richter sponsors a convivial evening with Bavarian beer and Schuhplattler at the end. An investment that pays off. Because in Bad Reichenhall, the Baltic German not only has the opportunity to get to know the elite of the Tsarist Empire better. He also made a name for himself as a promoter of ambition.

Kirill's influence on the rule of the Russian Empire. He then tirelessly championed the monarch's rights, published his appeals to the Russian subjects in his journal "Wirtschaftliche Aufbau-Korrespondenz" (Economic Reconstruction Correspondence), ennobled Kirill as a "contender for the imperial throne" - and in doing so opened a floodgate of money.

Scheubner-Richter made it clear to the prominent exile that he could only fulfill his dreams of ruling at the head of the empire if he drove out the hated Bolsheviks. At the beginning of the 1920s, the Russian émigré movement was convinced that the Communist revolution was only a brief phase in the history of their country, just as the German revolution of 1918/19 and its soviet rule were quickly swept away by the restorative forces. A fatal miscalculation, as it turned out in the years and decades to come. Nor did Kirill and his entourage give a thought to the fact that this upheaval was rooted in social causes, that the authoritarian imperial system of rule had outlived its usefulness and had ultimately perished due to its own inability to reform. And the form of democracy as in England, the USA or the young Weimar Republic was as attractive to these circles as cholera.

However, it was clear that Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky and the Red Guards could only be chased from their positions by force of arms. The reconquest of the homeland therefore became the goal of Kirill and his supporters. But the troops loyal to the monarchy had been defeated by the Reds. The Russians therefore had to reorganize their forces in exile. And they were dependent on foreign help. In Germany, only the radical nationalist parties came into question, which had taken up the cause of the people's right to self-defense against foreign rule and incompetent governments and who did not shy away from taking up arms to this end. Those who promoted these political groups and brought them into government could count on diplomatic and military support for their own plans. And Scheubner-Richter knew the person who, in his eyes, combined all these characteristics: Adolf Hitler, a proven Bolshevik hater who saw the source of all evil in the communist-Jewish world conspiracy.

It is therefore only logical that the Baltic German also channeled the political actions of the Tsar's successor into financial support for the NSDAP and its leader. In a 1935 report to Heinrich Himmler on monarchical organizations, the Russian General Vasilij Biskupskij, advisor and eminence grise of Kirill, described the amount of money that had flowed as a "downright horrendous sum".

In a letter to Arno Schickedanz in 1939, the general retrospectively estimated the financial aid granted at half a million gold marks.²⁴ By the standards of the time, this was truly a princely fortune and could not be compared with the meagre income of the Hitler Party from the contributions of its members.

Scheubner-Richter not only enlisted Biskupskij for the work of his organization. He also used the agile tsarist officer as a fundraiser.

Biskupskij, handsome and brash, was the ideal person for the job. A dazzling career was open to him under the Tsar, and at the outbreak of the October Revolution he was one of the youngest generals in the Russian army and commander of the 3rd Corps in Odessa. After the defeat of the Imperial Loyalists in the Ukraine, he arrived in Munich via Berlin. Biskupskij is characterized by a wide range of contacts, ingenuity and a certain unscrupulousness. This explosive mixture leads him to make daring deals. Together with two German entrepreneurs, Captain Luppe and the merchant Hoffmann, the Kirill intimate wants to set up a German-Russian trading company. The company to be founded was to raise seed capital of six million marks from wealthy Germans and Russians and use it to initiate lucrative business deals in the Balkans and later in southern Russia. Biskupskij demonstrates his talent for collecting money and manages to raise two million marks - one million marks each from his cousin Baron Vladimir Keppen and from the Grand Duchess Viktoria.²⁵ But the company is anything but profitable: as early as 1923, it makes losses through dubious speculation with the Hungarian gold mark. In 1926, the company had to be liquidated, the Grand Duchess and Baron Keppen lost their money, and the former contractual partners subsequently fought over their assets in court.

For Scheubner-Richter, the Tsar General's efforts were more successful. Biskupskij used his connections in Paris and tapped into the Russian Association of Commerce, Industry and Trade based there. The donations flowed in, as members of the organization were the entrepreneurs and oil magnates Denisov, Nobel and Gukasov, who had "saved very large sums of money from the Russian collapse"²⁶, according to Biskupsky. He himself was no stranger to the donors: Shortly after his escape from Russia, the officer had already made adventurous plans with army friends to recapture the lost oil fields in the Caucasus. Entrepreneurs like to hear such siren songs - the distant hope of these possessions opens their wallets.

Even the reactionary politician von Cramer-Klett, next to the tsarist officer in

Scheubner-Richter's Aufbau-Vereinigung was active, filling the coffers through his connections. The Bavarian aristocrat procures funds from the companies MAN and Mannesmann.²⁷ Nevertheless, the conspiratorial measures do not remain completely hidden. Eastern European powers have the individuals observed and carry out research. In several reports, the Polish secret service put the share capital of the Aufbau-Vereinigung at 300,000 marks, and in 1921 the sum even swelled to over 700,000 marks.²⁸ An enormous fortune at a time when a house only cost a few thousand marks, a powerful tool in the hands of unscrupulous politicians like Hitler to push through their radical right-wing goals. Similarly, an internal memorandum from the Bavarian government confirms that Scheubner-Richter had "enormous sums" at his disposal⁽²⁹⁾.

The Baltic German owed these funds to another prominent figure with whom he built up a relationship of trust during his time in Munich: General Erich Ludendorff. Scheubner-Richter knew the First Quartermaster General from his military service: Ludendorff commanded the battles against the Russians. The Baltic systematically intensified his personal relationships after the general took up residence in a villa on Ludwigshöhe south of Munich. A contact worth its weight in gold - especially for Hitler.

This connection between Scheubner and Richter subsequently brought the Nazi leader public attention and prestige. The Russian-German brings Hitler together with Erich Ludendorff. Ludendorff, celebrated as the "Hero of Tannenberg" in the First World War, was considered the most respected war veteran in the Weimar period alongside Paul Hindenburg in nationalist circles. Ludendorff embodied the old virtues of a Prussian officer; even his often overbearing appearance and his gait, as if he had just swallowed a stick, reinforced this image. He was born in 1865 as the third of six children of a landowner in a village near Posen. His father sent him to cadet school at the age of twelve. Ludendorff became a lieutenant at the age of 17 - the start of a stellar career as an officer. After losing the war, the general eagerly spread the "stab-in-the-back legend", according to which the German defeat was only due to betrayal at home. In his 1921 book "Kriegsführung und Politik" (Warfare and Politics), he propagated anti-Semitic theories: "The supreme government of the Jewish people is working hand in hand with France and England. Perhaps it is leading both."³⁰ He detested the left-wing democrats of the Weimar Republic and wanted to restore the situation before 1914 - by force of arms if necessary. In 1925, he even ran for President of the Reich, but only received 1.1 percent of the vote. In the last years of his life until his death in 1937, Ludendorff deteriorated mentally more and more, he pursued abstruse ideas, founded a pseudo-religious, racist

Sect, sees himself persecuted by dark "supranational powers", by Jews and Freemasons. As early as January 1924, the Bavarian senior government councillor Karl Sommer passed judgment on Ludendorff's mental state: he had "undoubtedly lost all sense of proportion with regard to real reality. The collapse of October 1918 with all its terrible consequences has not remained without influence on his mental state."³¹

For Hitler, the general was a shining figurehead of the movement. Ludendorff claimed Lieutenant Scheubner-Richter as "a kind of liaison between Adolf Hitler and myself"³², as his most important personal adviser and as the distributor of the donations that patrons gave directly to the World War II hero. A practical arrangement: the general is seen as the epitome of an impeccable officer, he represents the traditional soldierly virtues of discipline, honor and obedience. This is why donors have no worries that he could divert the sums entrusted to him into his own pocket. And through his contacts, Ludendorff has access to the army's coffers, which support paramilitary organizations of all kinds.

Such armed troops dominated the scene in the years following the First World War. They were not only tolerated by the governments and the regular army, but secretly encouraged. After the peace treaty of Versailles, the German Reich was officially only allowed to maintain a Reichswehr of 100,000 men - far too few in the eyes of many politicians and nationalist circles. This was remedied by volunteer units of all kinds, which were not organized by the state and therefore did not form part of the official army. These armed troops fulfilled several functions: They were intended to intervene in the event of another civil war, as in the German Revolution of 1918/19, and they formed a reservoir of men in case the headcount of the regular Reichswehr needed to be increased quickly. As compulsory military service was abolished as a result of the lost world war, the paramilitary units also served as substitute training and physical exercise for future young soldiers and as an employment opportunity for the unemployed - after all, those in need in these troops usually received a warm meal and clothing. The numerous organizations are successors to the former residents' militia, spin-offs from former military units or newly founded.

Above all, however, the troops represent a considerable power factor. After the failed Kapp Putsch in Berlin, further rumors of an imminent coup d'état were in the air. Right-wing and "patriotic" organizations were eager for revenge for the unpopular Weimar democracy and the humiliating conditions of the imposed peace treaty. A political movement without effective armed units of its own in the background seemed like a toothless tiger in the 1920s.

Hitler knows this too. He set up his own private army, the Sturmabteilung (SA), early on. Originally a party thug squad to keep order at party events and marches, the SA soon developed into a paramilitary force that put its strength to the test in hand-to-hand combat against political opponents. In more or less secret military exercises in the forests around Munich, the SA men, most of them former soldiers, receive training in weapons and military tactics. For Hitler, they represented the core of his own plans at the beginning of the 1920s to achieve political power not through elections, but through violence and overthrow. Hitler later testified before the People's Court in February 1924 that he had promoted the military training of the SA "with the absolute motive of attack", that his people were "filled night after night and morning after morning in the barracks exclusively with thoughts of war", "They asked, when are we going to start, when are we finally going to fight to knock the gang out?"³³

The SA is a kind of political currency. This is why Hitler consistently increased the number of troops and had the teams regularly drill with rifles. But the SA devours a lot of money for the leaders' salaries, for hidden weapons depots, for transportation and food. Any external support from other troops was therefore highly welcome and worth as much to him as cash - as was any strengthening of his military power through access to the troops of other Freikorps units. In 1923, Hitler oracles more and more openly about his plans for a coup against the government of the "November criminals" in Berlin. But for this he needed more violent warriors than just his SA thugs.

Scheubner-Richter's friend Ludendorff comes at just the right time. The world war hero enjoyed a far higher reputation among the right-wing paramilitaries than the Austrian Private Hitler, and his word carried the weight of a de facto leader. The general tries to convince the various organizations of a common leadership and the necessity of armed action. In February 1923, he promoted the founding of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Vaterländischen Kampfverbände (Working Group of the Fatherland Combat Associations), to which the SA, the Bund Oberland, the Reichsflagge organization, the Wikingbund and the Kampfverband Niederbayern (Lower Bavaria Combat Association) belonged - all tried and tested right-wing nationalist fighters. The military leadership was in the hands of the pioneering lieutenant colonel Hermann Kriebel, while Hitler's party comrade and friend Ernst Röhm, the "Machine Gun King of Bavaria" and ruler of secret arsenals, provided the weapons and ammunition. At the end of February, Ludendorff also organized a meeting between Hitler and the leaders of North German paramilitary units in Berlin in order to broaden the common basis for a putsch.

Ludendorff even organized a meeting with General Hans von Seeckt, the head of the army command of the Reichswehr after the war, to get backing for the plans of the Bavarian nationalists and to organize the training of civilian volunteer units by the Reichswehr. The informal agreement relieves the Nazi party coffers - the costs of training the SA are ultimately borne by the official army and thus the state. The meeting takes place on February 20 in Berlin in the villa on Wannsee owned by Friedrich Minoux, the general director and confidant of the industrial magnate Hugo Stinnes. Minoux also provided Hitler with considerable financial support via Ludendorff.⁽³⁴⁾ The general director could be sure of his employer's approval: Stinnes, one of Germany's most prominent business leaders in the early 1920s and ruler of a conglomerate of iron, steel and coal companies, told the American ambassador Alanson Houghton that "a dictator must be found who has the power to do whatever is necessary. Such a man must speak the language of the people and be bourgeois himself, and such a man is ready. A great movement emanating from Bavaria, determined to restore the old monarchies, is close at hand."⁽³⁵⁾ Minoux not only turned on the money tap, but also met with Ludendorff several times in Bavaria. In the event of a coup d'état in Berlin, he hoped for the post of finance minister and reaffirmed his solidarity: "Position towards Hitler-Ludendorff unchanged, also Jewish question"⁽³⁶⁾, the minutes of a conspiratorial meeting from early November 1923 succinctly note.

With Ludendorff's help, Scheubner-Richter succeeded in obtaining an important post in September 1923: He became managing director of the German Combat League and thus formally also master of the organization's accounts. The Kampfbund was a newly founded alliance of the NSDAP, Bund Oberland and the Reichsflagge. The alliance is a result of the joint demonstration of power on the occasion of the "German Day" in Nuremberg at the beginning of September, where participants celebrated the victory over the French in September 1870. The police estimated the number of visitors at over 100,000, with Prince Ludwig Ferdinand of Bavaria, Hitler and Ludendorff among the guests of honor. Warriors' clubs, members of patriotic associations, National Socialists and officers' associations march through Nuremberg in unison under flags and with music - an impressive spectacle of right-wing nationalist forces for the spectators.

Adolf Heiss, leader of the Reichsflagge, bluntly formulates what Hitler and Scheubner-Richter really want with this private army: "We make no secret of the fact that we want the national revolution under the banner of black, white and red with the swastika! And under this banner we will win."⁽³⁷⁾ Hitler was similarly clear at the end of September 1923: "We

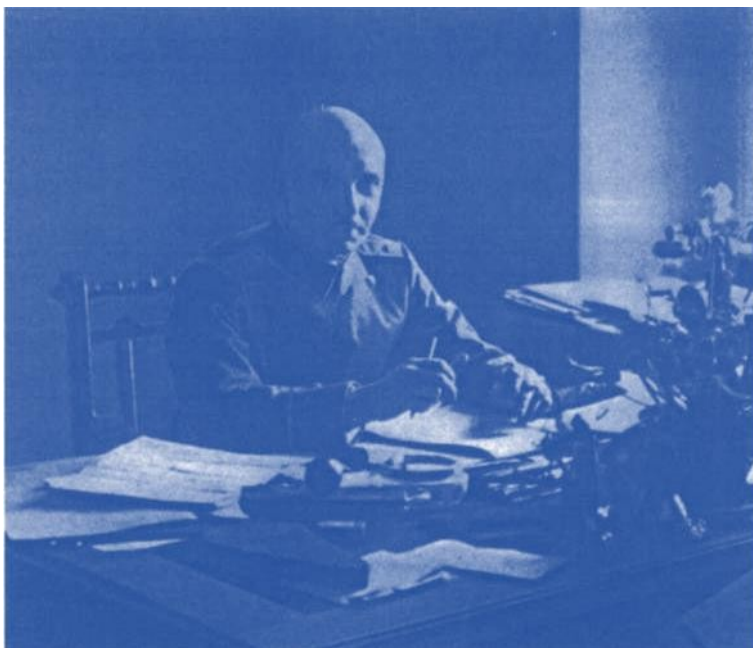
want to become the bearers of the dictatorship of national reason, national energy, national brutality and determination. There are only two possibilities: Either Berlin marches and ends up in Munich, or Munich marches and ends up in Berlin."³⁸

Hitler was sure of the support of the Kampfbund and its loyal managing director in his putsch plans. Scheubner-Richter not only organized the exercises and the financing of the paramilitary troops, but also drafted an "action programme" for Hitler. In it, he shows that he has learned the lessons of the hated Bolsheviks Lenin and Trotsky: "The struggle for political power in Bavaria is therefore reduced in practice to a struggle for possession of the exercising power," writes Scheubner-Richter,

"the fighting organizations will only be able to successfully pursue their real task, the defeat of Marxism, when they are in possession of the means of state power in Bavaria."³⁹ Like a great revolutionary, the Baltic German advises exploiting the "dissatisfaction prevailing among the population" and choosing the right "psychological moment". "Since, as we know, the political attitude of the population is determined exclusively by economic considerations, i.e. the price of beer and bread, any political action we envisage must have an economic starting point."⁴⁰ Scheubner-Richter's agitational skills shine through in the action program. In the fall of 1923, the economy was in the doldrums, "unemployment and hunger stood like looming ghosts at many doors"⁴¹, as a contemporary report described the situation. Hyperinflation reaches its peak: a glass of beer costs 150 million marks in November, in the summer of 1923 it was still 3,000 marks, in 1922 the average person put 60 marks on the table. No wonder the population was worried about the future - they still remembered the prices of the good old days. Before the First World War, a pint of beer cost 13 pfennigs; in 1918, customers paid 17 pfennigs for a sip of barley juice. In 1914, a pound of potatoes cost just 4 pfennigs, and in November 1923, the figure swelled to 30 billion marks.

Scheubner-Richter believes the time is ripe for action. The political climate made the chances of a revolution appear favorable: Reich Chancellor Gustav Stresemann announces the end of German passive resistance to the occupation of the Ruhr by French troops - a disgrace for nationalist circles. Rumors of a coup against the Weimar government are spreading, the Bavarian government declares a state of emergency and gives Gustav von Kahr, Commissioner General of the State, dictatorial powers. Together with the Bavarian Reichswehr commander Otto von Lossow and Hans von Seisser, the head of the state police, von Kahr plans a "March on Berlin".

"March on Berlin".



Max Erwin von Scheubner-Richter, Riga 1918

Hitler and Scheubner-Richter see their skins swimming away and want to pre-empt the triumvirate around Kahr with a coup of their own. Like conspirators, the Baltic German and the Nazi leader kept the number of accomplices small. Only Ludendorff, SA man Hermann Göring, Kriebel and Friedrich Weber, leader of the Oberland League, knew about the complete plan and the specific time of the coup: the coup was to start on November 8, 1923 in the evening in the Bürgerbräukeller - where Kahr wanted to give a speech and many prominent Bavarian politicians had announced their attendance.

The Bürgerbräukeller on Munich's Rosenheimer Strasse is packed with 3,000 people that evening. At around 8.30 pm, Hitler, Scheubner-Richter and Göring arrive with SA troops and other Kampfbund men and bring a machine gun into position. While von Kahr gives his speech, Hitler enters the hall. He takes another pull from his glass of beer, throws it clinking to the floor, climbs onto a chair, draws his pistol, fires a shot into the ceiling and shouts: "The national revolution has just broken out!".

lution has just broken out!" And in a voice overflowing with excitement:

"The hall is occupied by 600 heavily armed men, nobody is allowed to leave the hall. The Bavarian government and the Reich government have been deposed, a provisional Reich government is being formed."⁴²Kahr, Lossow and Seisser had to go into the next room under SA escort, where Hitler negotiated with them about participating in his putsch government and offered them posts. Hitler becomes theatrical: "If things go wrong, I have four shots in my pistol, three for my employees, if they leave me, the last bullet for me."⁴³

Meanwhile, Scheubner-Richter races to Ludwigshöhe by car to pick up Ludendorff. After an hour, they both return to the charged atmosphere of the Bürgerbräukeller. The Quartermaster General persuades Kahr, Lossow and Seisser to join in. Together with the triumvirate, Hitler announces the new partnership to the audience in the hall, shaking hands with everyone. Scheubner-Richter leads the arrests of some of the Bavarian politicians present. Ludendorff makes the surprised trio promise to cooperate - and releases them.

This is the beginning of the end of the generally amateurishly organized coup d'état. Kahr, Lossow and Seisser want to do anything but make common cause with Hitler. Instead, they alert the Reichswehr and the police and organize resistance against the putschists. This made it clear that the official state authorities were against Hitler, and without the support of the army and police, the plan was doomed from the outset.

Scheubner-Richter, in the style of a professional revolutionary, tries a feint: he draws up a proclamation to the Bavarian people, forges the signature of "Dr. v. Kahr" and sends the paper to the police headquarters. But the fraud is discovered, the officers know the characteristic letters of the signatures of the State Commissioner General. The Baltic German briefly goes home to his apartment in Widemayerstrasse. He reports to his wife: "Everything went smoothly, beyond expectations, without bloodshed. I still have a lot to do and won't be home tonight."⁴⁴This is the last time Mathilde von Scheubner-Richter sees her husband alive. On the morning of November 9, the mood of the putschists is crushed - the uprising is lost. Hitler, Ludendorff and Scheubner-Richter decide on a desperate action and start a "reconnaissance and demonstration march" around midday. Around 2,000 men line up, march armed in rows of 16 across the Ludwigsbrücke bridge to Marienplatz, with Ludendorff in the front row in the middle and Scheubner-Richter and Hitler next to him. The Baltic German has put on his beloved uniform of the 7th Royal Bavarian Chevauxlegers Regiment, he wears the Pickelhaube on his head and the Iron Cross on his chest

stapled. Which policeman or soldier wanted to shoot at the World War II hero and the other war veterans?

After Marienplatz, the column turns right and heads down Residenzstrasse towards Odeonsplatz. The combat allies sing the song "O Deutschland hoch in Ehren", Scheubner-Richter joins Hitler. At the Feldherrnhalle, a chain of policemen is waiting, their carbines ready to fire. A spectator shouts: "Here he comes, Heil Hitler!" A single shot is fired - by whom, it cannot be clarified later. This is followed by volleys and a wild firefight lasting about half a minute. Screams, gunpowder fumes, people throwing themselves to the ground. In the end, 14 coup plotters and four policemen die in a hail of bullets. Scheubner-Richter is hit directly in the heart by a bullet. He is killed instantly. As he falls, he pulls Hitler to the ground with him, possibly saving the Nazi leader's life. Hitler dislocates his upper left arm as he falls and is able to flee in the general confusion. If the shooter had hit just 50 centimetres further to the left - the history of the world would be a different one.

The life of the right-wing revolutionary and friend of the tsar ends abruptly on November 9, 1923 in Munich. At the funeral in Munich's Ostfriedhof cemetery, the Protestant pastor Kreppey praised him in his funeral address as the "most German of all Germans". But Scheubner-Richter does not yet find his final resting place. In 1935, Hitler had his mortal remains excavated - as well as those of the other putschists - and transferred in a bronze sarcophagus to a specially erected "temple of honor" on Munich's Königsplatz, whose design was said to be reminiscent of Greek temples and bore the pompous name

"Eternal Guard". There it lies between Lorenz Ritter von Stransky and Ludendorff's servant Kurt Neubauer.

Mathilde von Scheubner-Richter remained loyal to the Nazis, working for several years in the same office as Heinrich Himmler and setting up a press clipping service for Hitler. He exploited the putsch for his own purposes: "The events of November 9th proved to be the most effective propaganda for National Socialism"⁴⁵, he declared with satisfaction. The Nazi dictator stylized the date as the highest holiday of the "movement". Every year, he marches the old route from the Bürgerbräukeller, lays wreaths at Scheubner-Richter and the dead "Blutzeugen". But in January 1947, the Allies put an end to the haunting: they blew up the temple of honor, removed the remains and had the bronze sarcophagus melted down. Scheubner-Richter thus disappeared from the public consciousness as silently as he had previously appeared.



KURT LÜDECKE

The Playboy

A bright summer afternoon in August 1922: NSDAP formations march onto Munich's Königsplatz, the party soldiers in the front row carry flags with the swastika emblem, a band plays marching music. The crowd, around 50,000 people, greeted the brown shirts with cheers. Adolf Hitler steps up to the microphone on the podium. A moment of silence falls over the square. The Nazi leader begins his speech calmly, but quickly raises his tone of voice and volume, his voice cracks as he rails against "Jewish Bolshevism" and praises the South: "Bavaria is the most German state in Germany!" Applause breaks out. Honor, freedom, fatherland - the final battle cry "Germany awake!" is drowned out by the thousands of cheers from the audience.

Only a few meters away from Hitler stands a 32-year-old, tall, elegantly dressed man who has just arrived from Berlin with his friend Count Ernst zu Reventlow: Kurt Lüdecke. He watches the speaker's every expression with fascination. "I forgot everything around me except this man," says Lüdecke later about Hitler, who was only a year older, "he seemed to be a different Luther." The Berliner felt transformed - he, who had previously led a luxurious but useless life, "a wanderer without a destination", full of

"Longing for heroic deeds, but without a hero". Now, on this afternoon in the middle of Munich, everything was to be different: "I knew my search had come to an end. I had found myself, my guide and my goal."¹

The young man takes the initiative: he wants to offer his services to this party leader, so he needs a meeting with the NSDAP chairman as soon as possible. Count Reventlow, a well-known anti-Semite in the right-wing nationalist scene, helps. A few days later, Lüdecke visited Hitler at the party headquarters and the two spoke for four hours. "We shook hands ceremoniously, we had sealed the pact. I had given him my soul," Lüdecke recalls. Behind his pathetic description lies an arrangement that made Lüdecke a kind of special ambassador for Hitler abroad for years to come. It is a testament to the Berlin native's dexterity and quick tongue how quickly he was able to win Hitler over. The job was a delicate one: to arrange and cultivate contacts with influential personalities - and above all to raise money. The young man, who described himself as an "adventurer" and "globetrotter", was to fulfill this mission so well in the years to come that history's verdict on him was clear: "There is no doubt that Hitler and the NSDAP received considerable amounts of money via Lüdecke, undoubtedly the most opaque man in Hitler's immediate environment, not only from his own possessions, but also large sums that he arranged from abroad."²In those August days of 1922, the converted Hitler disciple was still a blank slate, a no-name, one of many new party comrades. He had not yet demonstrated his rare talents. But the Dan- dy's urbane appearance and his open display of anti-Semitism impressed even the suspicious NSDAP leader. Lüdecke spoke English, French, Spanish and Italian fluently, impressing Hitler, who himself spoke no foreign languages and at best heard curses in Bavarian dialect from his camarilla. The man could be useful to the party - if he was used correctly. The first object to test the abilities of party member Lüdecke was soon chosen by Hitler: Benito Mussolini.

Kurt Lüdecke thus begins another chapter on his life's journey, which is full of twists and turns, often overshadowed by dark storm clouds. He was born in Berlin on February 5, 1890, the youngest son of Albert and Elise Lüdecke. Kurt grew up in Oranienburg, a town north of the German capital. His father, the director of a chemical factory, kept a close eye on his son's academic performance at elementary school and grammar school in Berlin. The patriarch relentlessly punishes poor grades with the cane. After one of these beatings, young Kurt flees home on his bicycle; only a collision with a mail van stops the runaway two days later. After the trouble at school increases, Kurt Lüdecke is im-

Kurt's father, who is often offended by his contradictions and inattentiveness, sends him to a grammar school in Braunschweig on the advice of the principal. There Kurt met the Knigge brothers and barons and spent many weekends at the family's aristocratic country estate. It was an exciting, unfamiliar world for Kurt Lüdecke: the extensive estates, the servants, the barons' habitus as representatives of the social elite - the scent of luxury and wealth beguiled the son of the bourgeoisie and he learned to appreciate "the life of a Prussian aristocrat in its most beautiful form". When the father dies as a result of a long-standing nervous condition, the situation changes dramatically for the Lüdecke family: the illness of the head of the family has eaten up most of the family's assets and the money is more or less insufficient. Over the next few years, the mother will be dependent on the support of her three sons. Kurt only transfers modest sums to his mother, thus largely evading this obligation - even though he himself has become wealthy. He probably has no deeper family ties later on either; his mother remains a topic that Lüdecke hardly ever mentions to friends - he seems to have simply cut his family roots after he leaves. After leaving school, Kurt Lüdecke completed a three-month internship at a Hamburg export company, which gave him the desire to become a businessman. He volunteered for a year's military service with the 2nd Infantry Regiment in Munich because he wanted to meet a schoolmate who had started studying in the Bavarian capital. His service in the army turns into a fiasco: Kurt gets into trouble with his superiors and is arrested for three days for having an illicit affair with a woman. The strict hierarchies, unconditional obedience and constant drill are not for the freedom-loving young soldier, who is allergic to authority. The year in the military ends without the usual promotions, "a deep hatred of sergeants", according to Lüdecke, remains etched in his mind.

The 19-year-old escapes to the big wide world, probably as a counter-program to the confinement of the barracks yard. His first destination was London. "The swaggering liberality was a revelation for me," says Lüdecke, "the English gentleman seemed more rounded in terms of knowledge, character and foresight than his German counterpart."³He worked for a few months as an apprentice merchant at a cotton company, otherwise enjoying the day and being bored at the same time. But Kurt Lüdecke knows an effective antidote to this: he simply breaks up his tents and travels on - this time to Paris. Living in such cities costs money, his jobs hardly pay enough, so Lüdecke throws himself into a new passion: gambling. "With constant uniformity"

the young man wins at the baccarat and roulette tables, his travel funds increase enormously. He becomes a regular at the casinos in Deauville, Biarritz and Monte Carlo and can afford trips to Italy, Egypt and India. But it is doubtful whether the gambling winnings alone will be enough. After all, luck is notoriously unreliable and cannot be planned in advance - especially if you are dependent on a regular income for your extravagant lifestyle. In fact, Lüdecke seems to have deliberately used his good looks and charm to his own financial advantage from an early age: He starts affairs with wealthy women, apparently letting them keep him and pocketing plenty of money. In retrospect, Lüdecke describes his playboy existence at the time as follows:

"Life was pleasant - far too pleasant in the end. I wore clothes from London, I had my own chauffeur at the wheel of my big car, I had more money so I didn't know what to do with it. And I had Dolores, perhaps the only real person in my shallow world. She was another man's wife, but we lived together. Apart from Dolores, my aimless and useless life had become routine. Every day of the year a man could kiss a countess, shake hands with a grand duke, drink cocktails with an American millionaire; the only props were a clean face, a dinner jacket and some change in his pocket. Repeat this recipe 365 days a year and you have a long year behind you."⁴

Lüdecke's successful larking about at the expense of others is a little like Thomas Mann's novel hero Felix Krull, the con man. Always friendly and obliging, with the sweet charm of a marriage swindler on the hunt for wealthy women to finance his own life. As a gallant counter-relief, the gentleman offers entertaining diversion - and sex. But Lüdecke does not stop at conquering women. He devotes himself to another lucrative hobby: sex with men.

His contacts with the male sex are obviously not based on a clear sexual imprint - he has regular relationships with women. Rather, Lüdecke was pursuing very mundane financial interests - through blackmail. This is revealed by the documents of the public prosecutor's office at the Royal District Court II in Berlin. The authorities received a complaint in January 1911 and investigated it for "extortion on a homosexual basis". According to the public prosecutor's office, Lüdecke was notorious in "homosexual circles" for looking for rich partners and forcing them to make payments after sexual intercourse.⁵ The investigators were unable to catch the accused, who left Berlin in good time. Lüdecke cleverly exploited the legal situation with his blackmail: Homosexuality is a punishable offense in Germany, as in most other countries.

exposing and publicizing a homosexual relationship would be ruinous for men from the upper classes. At the time, the topic was considered taboo and those affected were threatened with social ostracism. It is therefore understandable that the victims, in their distress, would rather pay than risk scandal and imprisonment. Lüdecke's method guarantees a dirty but rich source of money.

The various sexual proclivities of the gigolo from Berlin did not go unnoticed by Hitler's vassals. Ernst Hanfstaengl, one of the Nazi leader's early confidants in Munich, still insulted "anyone who dared to stand up for this filthy subject" as a "hustler protector" years later⁽⁶⁾He collected material against the unpopular figure, which he submitted to the Foreign Office with the written reference that Lüdecke "is also said to have had intimate relationships with other men and received benefits in return"⁷; however, this denunciation did not lead to any legal proceedings with the authorities. And Hitler friend Dietrich Eckart said of Lüdecke that he "pushed himself forward so unscrupulously" and "reeked of perfume at six paces, and looked like the worst dandy" and was therefore preparing to "drive the NSDAP into the ground".

"into the ground"⁸.

But the scolded man is not deterred by this. Even Hitler had nothing negative to say about Lüdecke's male adventures. Especially as Lüdecke kept showing himself with wealthy women like Dolores. His desire to travel to countries such as America, France and England is unbroken. His next acquaintance on the road is the Cuban Rosita Mapleson, wife of the former aide-de-camp to the Duke of Marlborough. The wealthy lady allows Lüdecke to take pleasurable trips to the beautiful spots of Europe. The outbreak of the First World War puts an end to his carefree existence - for the time being. Lüdecke is drafted to Lahr in Baden for military service. There, Lüdecke once again ran up against the authorities and the strict spirit of discipline, which was pretty much the opposite of his usual life. The consequence: he is sent to prison for 14 days. As soon as Lüdecke breathes fresh air again, he tries to evade being sent to the front. At first, an operation on his left foot prevents him from being transported to the fighting troops. Barely recovered, he has himself examined again. This time he feigns nervous problems. In the doctor's surgery, he collapses with a hysterical seizure to great public effect. His performance has an effect: Lüdecke is sent to a sanatorium for the mentally ill; it takes weeks and weeks before the doctor sends him back as cured. In the end, Lüdecke achieved his goal: the army discharged him from the army in May 1917 as permanently unfit for service.

His foreign languages and knowledge of foreign countries promptly earned him a

job as a purchasing commission agent at AEG in Berlin. His job not only takes him to Copenhagen, Amsterdam and Zurich, but also gives him a deeper insight into the mechanisms of international trade for the first time - a practice he draws on from then on. Lüdecke was soon out into the wide world with crazy business ideas. He tries his hand at founding a shipping line with German freighters under foreign flags - and fails right from the start. In Argentina, he tries his luck as a representative of German aircraft for South America. But the planes from overseas never arrive. In Mexico, Lüdecke wanted to found a foreign legion - but without success. At least he manages to acquire Mexican citizenship there and with it a Mexican passport.

In June 1920, Lüdecke traveled back to his native Berlin. There he was able to negotiate a settlement with the air transport company for the sum of 150,000 marks for his sales efforts. His next job as a traveling salesman for the Peters Union rubber factory in Frankfurt am Main brought him even more success. He sells tires in the Baltic States and in Reval. Lüdecke made a net profit of 500,000 marks, of which he invested 350,000 marks in US dollars at the Schweizerische Creditanstalt in Zurich.⁽⁹⁾As a globetrotter, Lüdecke did not even think of transferring all his money to Germany, but spread his assets over several accounts abroad. This caution in banking matters was soon to pay off - when inflation in Germany in 1922/1923 turned the domestic banknotes into old paper. The more the currency devaluation ate through, the more foreign currency counted - a few Swiss francs or dollars were enough for a week of luxury living in Germany. And Lüdecke had plenty to draw on: in April 1922, he had 1,400 dollars in his Munich account at Dresdner Bank alone, which amounted to millions of marks in German inflationary currency. And the US notes become more valuable every day.

Lüdecke landed in Munich in May 1921, regularly interrupted by business and pleasure trips. He tries his hand as a gallery owner with an "exhibition of German pictures in New York", which is why he takes a ship to America in September. The exhibition was a financial flop, but the sale of a few copper engravings and old blankets at least covered the costs. But Lüdecke is able to work in New York for a detective agency that manages anti-Semitic campaigns on behalf of car mogul Henry Ford. The pleasant side effect: the industrialist made vast sums of money available for this smear propaganda, which undercover employees could access in abundance - which Lüdecke did.¹⁰When he returned to Munich, he took a Ford portrait with him as a souvenir, which he later gave to Hitler for his office.

As a new admirer of the NSDAP leader, Lüdecke makes himself useful with the activities that he knows best: initiating contacts and making money for his partners. For the Bavaria-centered Nazi party, the idea of putting out feelers to Italy and seeking out the rising star Benito Mussolini seemed almost revolutionary. And perhaps foreign currency could be obtained from the fascists there. Despite his devotion to Hitler, Lüdecke obtained the backing of General Erich Ludendorff, whose famous name he was allowed to use as a reference and door opener.

Lüdecke traveled to Milan and phoned Mussolini, saying that he was bringing "an important message from important people". He receives him at three o'clock in the afternoon in the building of the newspaper he founded, the "Popolo d'Italia". When Lüdecke arrives at the imposing editorial offices, he is met by an assistant in a black shirt and escorted to the second floor; another black shirt takes him to the Duce's huge office. The whole ambience contrasts sharply with the modest Nazi party headquarters in Munich. Lüdecke still has no idea who is waiting for him, as he has never seen a picture of the fascist leader. Mussolini turns out to be a man with a massive body, a massive skull and "powerful, almost frightening eyes", as the visitor notes, with an extensive education, speaking French and some German. Lüdecke notices the Italian's slender and gentle hands, his chewed fingernails, his shabby dark suit and his crumpled shirt. The conversation reveals how clever the joker Ludendorff is: Mussolini knows the world war general, but not Hitler. Lüdecke reports on the Nazi movement and the Duce takes this opportunity to demand that South Tyrol, with its population of around 150,000 Germans, must irrevocably remain part of Italy. For since 1919, this region has no longer been Austrian territory. The German emissary does not yet dare to talk about money - after all, who wants to financially support a party whose leader is completely unknown?

Back in Munich, Lüdecke reports to his party chairman about the trip. He made further cooperation with the Italian fascists palatable to Hitler, saying that Mussolini, who was completely unknown in Germany, was the Italian mirror image of the Nazi dictator: a lonely man, convinced of his great mission, a war veteran, a brilliant orator, an enemy of democracy, Marxism and parliamentarianism, a leader, a Duce - just like Hitler. And Mussolini has a powerful force of Black Shirts, similar to the SA Brown Shirts, which the fascist leader wants to deploy against the government in Rome. Hitler is taken with the idea of an alliance with Italian like-minded people, even more so after Mussolini's

"March on Rome" at the end of October 1922, which heralded the beginning of the Blackshirt dictatorship in Italy and transformed the unknown into a European celebrity.

Mussolini sees the unrest during the socialist general strike as his opportunity: he exploits the fear of civil war and announces his march on Rome with his fascist troops in order to overthrow the government. King Victor Emmanuel III then appoints him Prime Minister against the will of Parliament. Mussolini single-mindedly secured power for his fascist party, and his dictatorship was sealed in April 1924 when a new electoral law gave his supporters a two-thirds majority in parliament. In this way, the Italian right-wing radical accomplished what it would take Hitler another nine years to achieve: the establishment of comprehensive right-wing rule. This marked the end of the long road to power for Mussolini, the son of a blacksmith from a provincial town in Emilia-Romagna. After training as a primary school teacher, Mussolini joined the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) in 1901. A year later, he fled to Switzerland to avoid military service, but returned after an amnesty and completed his military service. His party work for the PSI, his job as editor-in-chief of the left-wing newspaper

"Avanti" and his propaganda activities earned him over a dozen prison sentences by 1915. Mussolini swung from opposing the war to supporting it, broke with the Socialists and founded the Fascist movement with like-minded people, which became the National Fascist Party (PNF) in 1921.

Hitler admired the Duce's success with his coup d'état in October 1922 - at a time when he was still dreaming of such great deeds and his NSDAP was just one of many right-wing groups. Almost exactly one year later, on November 8/9, 1923, Hitler tried to imitate the Duce's victory and planned a march on Berlin. However, the coup fails in the first phase at the Feldherrnhalle in Munich in the face of police gunfire. After the Nazi takeover, the brown Reich Chancellor met Mussolini in person for the first time in Venice in 1933. The two later reaffirmed their friendship with the "Rome-Berlin axis" and as brothers in arms during the Second World War. Hitler remained loyal to the Italian dictator throughout his life. When the Duce was deposed and arrested in 1943, Hitler had him freed from his Gran Sasso prison in Abruzzo by German special forces; with the help of the Wehrmacht, Mussolini was able to proclaim a fascist counter-government in the town of Salò on Lake Garda. But the Duce could not stay in his enclave for long: On April 28, 1945, he and his lover Clara Petacci were shot by Italian resistance fighters.

Lüdecke and Hitler in the fall of 1922 after Mussolini's triumphant victory.



Adolf Hitler with Kurt Lüdecke

seizure of power, it was clear that Italy was the only state with similar national political goals and could therefore be considered as a priority foreign partner. The only problem, South Tyrol with its German-speaking population, was also solved by the Nazi leader in the fall of 1922: he signaled his willingness to give up South Tyrol politically for an alliance with Italy. Two years later, in "Mein Kampf", Hitler finally laid down the doctrine "that the German interests of lost territories must be ruthlessly set aside in favor of the sole interest of regaining the freedom of the main territory".¹¹ The dictator adhered to this after his seizure of power in 1933.

Hitler urged Lüdecke to make further contacts at the end of 1922: "Your most valuable work still lies ahead of you in Italy. You know how things stand with us. Will you go to Rome immediately?" Lüdecke was to establish the Nazis as the Duce's best friends, convey the party's disinterest in South Tyrol

"and in the end, if possible, get money."¹² Hitler cheered him on again on this important point: "Shred what you can out of Mussolini!"¹³

Due to Lüdecke's other stays abroad, the second trip to Milan was delayed until the end of August 1923.

He had a kind of Nazi diplomatic identity card issued for his trip, with a passport photo and the letterhead of the "Völkischer Beobachter". The "Legitimation" of 21 August 1923 reads as follows: "Mr. Curt Luedecke, born on 5 February 1890 in Berlin, is hereby commissioned to represent the National Socialist German Workers' Party in the Kingdom of Italy. We request that Mr. Luedecke be acknowledged in this capacity and that he be given support at all times. This authorization is provisionally valid up to and including December 31, 1923."¹⁴ Hitler personally seals the document with his signature. With this authorization in his luggage, Lüdecke marched back to the editorial offices of the "Popolo d'Italia". There he is received by the new editor-in-chief Arnaldo Mussolini, the brother of the newly elected minister president. The Duce is not expected back in Milan until the next day, and Lüdecke is due back at three o'clock. Benito Mussolini arrives on time, this time in a neatly tailored suit, with clean, well-groomed hands,

"a picture of health, tanned and charged with energy," notes Lüdecke. The Duce immediately recognizes the visitor, exchanges a few friendly words with him in German, reads Hitler's letter of legitimation carefully. They arrange to talk on the train that evening when the Minister President returns to Rome. The fascist leader only finds time for his guest at four o'clock in the morning. Lüdecke briefly outlines the tensions between the Munich nationalists and Berlin, appeals for sympathy for the movement - and arranges further contacts. The Duce sends his foreign minister Baron Russo to the German Nazi envoy in Rome. Lüdecke describes Hitler's intentions and requests financial support, even though Russo explains that Mussolini cannot "officially" support the Bavarian opposition party. But the Nazi ambassador didn't care, the main thing was that "the seeds were sown".¹⁵ As a special gesture from the Duce, he received an invitation to Mussolini's first reception for the king. Lüdecke obviously enjoyed this diplomatic parcel. He did not leave it at discreet attempts to collect money, but presented himself to the Italian media as the foreign policy spokesman of the NSDAP. He attracts attention in the media with big slogans: "Idea Nazionale" and "Corriere d'Italia" print articles about him,

"Avanti" and "L'Epoca" even made room on the front page for reports about the Nazi representative.

Lüdecke's first contacts with the fascists in the south bore ample fruit for Hitler in the following years - also financially: "There has been no shortage of Italian money since Mussolini's march on Rome."¹⁶ The exact sums can no longer be determined today. However, a number of witnesses independently confirm the flow of payments. The "Münchner Post" and the "Bayerische Kurier" reported on the money payments, mentioning an amount of

50,000 gold marks.¹⁷ At the end of the 1920s, Hitler filed a lawsuit for libel, which he won in the first instance. However, all court files dealing with this issue were removed from the Munich court between 1933 and 1934.¹⁸

Immediately after taking power in November 1922, Mussolini himself had a report drawn up "on the possibilities of actions by extreme right-wing elements in Bavaria"¹⁹- a success of Lüdecke's visit. Adolfo Tedaldi, the author of the report, pointed out the Bavarian nationalists' need for support. Because of the unresolved South Tyrol issue, there were "dangers that would arise for Italy if the Bavarian secession did not take place under our control, but under that of another power". Only one group took a clear position in favor of Italy's South Tyrol policy: the NSDAP. It was therefore only logical and reasonable for Mussolini to support the right-wing party that best served his interests. At the same time, the Duce took great care not to make his support public. For example, when a trial was held in Rome against a civil servant for embezzlement, it came to light that the missing funds were intended for Hitler. The proceedings were then continued in camera⁽²⁰⁾.

André François-Poncet, France's ambassador to Germany in the 1930s and an expert on international diplomacy, wrote in his memoirs that the Nazis collected money from the Italian Black Shirts. SS General Karl Wolff, chief of Heinrich Himmler's personal staff and the highest police leader in Italy, also confirmed that the Nazis collected funds from Mussolini before coming to power.²¹ And Prussian Prime Minister Otto Braun, looking back on the Italian financial electoral aid for the Nazis, which he estimated at 18 million marks, explained: "Hitler received enormous sums from Italy. They reach Munich via a Swiss bank."²²

Lüdecke's seed had indeed been sown. While he was still incognito to the public during his first visit to Mussolini, his celebrated second visit in the fall of 1923 caused some unrest among the diplomats. The Nazi representative believed he had to pay a visit to the official representatives, from diplomat to diplomat as it were. Friedrich von Prittwitz from the German embassy in Rome reported to the Foreign Office on September 22, 1923:

"Mr. Lüdecke came to see me personally and stated during his visit that his friends wished to avoid any conflict on the South Tyrolean question. When I replied that this was probably one of the few issues on which I could harmonize with his views, this earned me a lengthy lecture on the Judaization of the world. When Mr. Lüdecke had finished his tirade and left my room with grandeur, he returned to his room.

a few minutes to cross out the second line on his business card! I would be grateful if I could occasionally be informed about the personality of Mr. Lüdecke and in particular whether he is identical with a certain Lüdecke who was allegedly active as a Polish agent in Switzerland during the war."²³The Foreign Ministry wrote to the Foreign Office on 28 November 1923: "According to press reports, a National Socialist named Lüdecke is said to be in Rome with the task of maintaining the connection between the German National Socialists and the Italian Fascists. In some news reports, Lüdecke is pompously described as 'Hitler's envoy to Mussolini'. Since it is to be feared that Lüdecke is not only playing a ridiculous role in Rome, but is also carrying out activities detrimental to German interests, I have the honor to draw the attention of the Foreign Office to this personality and to ask for a favorable examination of the question of whether it is not appropriate and possible to pursue Lüdecke's removal from Italy in a way that seems suitable for this purpose."²⁴

A lot of fuss about a single member of a radical right-wing splinter party from Munich. The hectic diplomacy behind the scenes leads to no action. By the time the authorities react, Lüdecke has already set off on his next fundraising mission abroad. This also shows how little the authorities ultimately know about this person. However, the suspicion of espionage touches on a subject that has accompanied the German all his life: Is Lüdecke possibly an informer, an agent?

His conspicuous appearance, his regular stays abroad and his constant contact with people from third countries attract the attention and suspicion of those around him early on. Anyone who speaks French so fluently, maintains bank accounts in Switzerland, holds a Mexican passport and boasts about his international friends cannot be trustworthy - at least not in the eyes of some Germans, who have not moved beyond their own national borders and, after the loss of the First World War, see foreign states as enemies anyway. Lüdecke himself also contributes to such suspicions with his pompous presence: He uses his name several times in different variations, with the spellings Kurt and Curt, Luedecke or Lüdecke, or pretends to be an aristocratic "Ma- jor von Lüdecke". He also suffers the fate of being caught by the authorities at an early stage, so that he is put on record.

As early as 1914, at the outbreak of war, he was arrested on suspicion of espionage at his home in Lahr in Baden. The reason was a visit from his foreign girlfriend and a telegram with love greetings that Lüdecke sent her in English.

sent to her in English. This immediately causes a stir. The army puts the suspicious soldier in prison. But he is released a few weeks later and the case is dropped for lack of evidence.

The new NSDAP member Lüdecke is immediately rejected by Hitler's vassals. Envy and jealousy resonate because the newcomer manages to earn the trust of the Nazi leader in just a few days and secure a place in the innermost circle. But Hitler is not quite so trusting. He receives warnings from various quarters about the supposedly windy journeyman, who is possibly a bug in the party's pelt, hired to scout out the National Socialists. Lüdecke's generous donations in foreign currency for the party and for Hitler in particular annoyed some party members. When the Nazi dictator asked Max Amann, the managing director of the "Völkischer Beobachter", to distribute new propaganda leaflets, he refused - the coffers were empty. Lüdecke steps in and pulls three French hundred-franc bills out of his pocket and places them on Amann's desk. This covers the printing costs.

But what is meant to be a help turns out to be a mistake. Amann thanks him for the money - and files a complaint with the police against the hated party comrade. He testifies before the police:

"Once a certain Mr. Luedecke came to my office in Corneliusstrasse and gave me French banknotes as well as German money. I then deposited the money, made notes of the conversations I had with Luedecke and later handed Luedecke over to the police because I thought he was a French informer."²⁵ A nice friend. Amann justifies his betrayal with mere suspicions: Lüdecke "is a very cunning impostor, hounded with all dogs, who certainly already has all sorts of lumpy things on his plate. His sophistication and self-confident demeanor tell me that if - as I am convinced - he has been set up as an informer in our movement, he will be very well paid for it by his employers."²⁶

On January 27, 1923, the police arrested Lüdecke on suspicion of treason in his fourth-floor apartment at Franz-Josef-Strasse 30 in Schwabing. During the search, the officers discovered several hand graffiti, which they ignored. Instead, they confiscated Lüdecke's gold ring with an onyx seal engraved with a swastika and his initials. The arrested man was imprisoned for several weeks, but no official charges were brought for the time being. In the meantime, the case made headlines in the press, with newspapers suspecting Lüdecke to be a French spy. He has the misfortune that a person of the same name is actually

The French were the first to be identified in later years as scouts for the British secret service. Above all, the public prosecutor was interested in "the secret about my money", Lüdecke recalls: "German money may have been dizzying, but French money was leprous in their eyes. They bombarded me with questions: How had I earned my money? Where were my bank accounts? Why were they abroad? Why had I given the Nazis French francs?"²⁷In the end, Hitler used his connections with the police authorities and managed to have the party comrade released without trial or charge. The detective gives Lüdecke some parting advice: "You must be more careful in future, your good motives are not as obvious to your enemies - inside and outside the party - as you think. Nobody expects or believes such generosity."²⁸Lüdecke did not take the warning seriously - but he would get into trouble again in later years.

For the public, the release was a sensation: "It will probably be necessary," wrote the "Münchener Zeitung", "for the responsible authorities to provide further clarification on the surprising outcome of this case, in particular as to how it was possible for the man to come under such serious suspicion, which later proved to be completely unfounded."²⁹But the clarification failed to materialize. Hitler in particular showed no interest in this. The Nazi leader had allowed himself to be infected by the Lüdecke hysteria of his cronies: He condoned Amann's denunciation and stood idly by for a while. What's more, Hitler told the police that a potential informer, Lüdecke, "with his undoubtedly great knowledge of the most important internal affairs, especially those of Bavaria, represents an enormous danger in my eyes. I consider imprisonment without at least a long-term guarantee that he will be rendered harmless to be a serious prison sentence under certain circumstances."³⁰After the person concerned had stewed in prison, the Nazi dictator did not let him go, as some of the entourage had demanded, but on the contrary authorized the publication of an article by Lüdecke in the "Völkisch-scher Beobachter", in which the non-agent was allowed to whitewash himself and present himself as an exemplary party comrade. No evidence of any spying activity is ever found. But an aftertaste remains, perhaps because Lüdecke is openly curious when he asks other people what they consider to be spying. It is possible that, in addition to raising money for the NSDAP leader, he was actually investigating friends and opponents. Years later, Hitler still raved about Lüdecke's relevant skills abroad: "That would have been a representative for obscure areas: Iran, Iraq! That would have been the right man, he would have sniffed out everything."³¹

Despite all the rumors, Hitler continued to hold on to the party comrade. For good reason: Lüdecke pumped considerable sums into the party from his own fortune, gave the Nazi dictator money privately and invited him to dinner at the high-class restaurants "Walterspiel" and "Boettner". Over the course of time, he donated a total of 130,000 marks to the party coffers, as the police established.³² Above all, however, in addition to his passion for tailor-made suits, expensive cigars and fine wines, Lüdecke indulged in a far more expensive hobby: he maintained his own SA department. He spends another 100,000 marks on it. This impresses Hitler. The Nazi leader saw his own paramilitary troops as an important power factor for building up the party. Accordingly, he worked diligently to build up this private army. But this devours huge sums of money. That is why every sponsor who eases the burden on the party coffers is very welcome. Lüdecke sets to work with enthusiasm. He commissions two Jewish dealers to procure undamaged uniform parts, belts and weapons on the black market. He hires two former officers as company commanders, rents extra rooms as a meeting place and makes himself at home there with Ludwig, his assistant and butler. And as an extravagant splash of color, the sponsor orders a swastika banner made of pure silk. Ludwig cooks for the mostly unemployed volunteers, who eventually add up to a troop of around 100 men. One evening, Hitler visits his party comrade in his comfortably furnished accommodation. The wall is adorned with a huge swastika flag and Ludwig serves dinner for the guest of honor. The NSDAP leader is delighted: "Beautiful, this is very nice!" exclaims Hitler, "I always wanted something just like this. I love this place." Lüdecke replies: "I'm sure it won't be long before you have something much better."³³

Each SA member is given a tunic, knee breeches, tourist boots, gaiters, stockings, neck armbands, steel helmets and Austrian ski caps as headgear at Lüdecke's expense. The men also wear an arm band with the swastika and a silver-plated skull - an idea of Lüdecke's that would later become established in the SS. Even four drummers and four cross-pipers reinforce the storm troop. In case of emergency, Lüdecke set up a hiding place outside Munich with 15 heavy machine guns, over 200 hand grenades, 175 carbines and several thousand rounds of ammunition.

Lüdecke holds regular political training sessions on Wednesday evenings in the back room of a café in Schönfeldstrasse. Every member of his troop had to swear an oath on the swastika flag and pledge allegiance to Hitler. On Saturdays and Sundays, the troop practiced drills and cross-country combat in the woods outside Munich. Lüdecke's connections with the Reichswehr helped him to obtain a training hall with the 2nd Bavarian Regiment Kron-

prinz, which he uses for his SA company in bad weather. When he began to travel abroad more often again, his interest in the SA toy waned - he finally transferred command to Hermann Göring. After the failed Hitler putsch in November 1923, the war hero and former pilot Göring gave Lüdecke a new job as a fundraiser. Lüdecke, at the time of the failed coup d'état with Mussolini in Italy, visits Göring in hospital in Innsbruck, where the Hitler confidant is recovering from the bullet wound he received from a police bullet during the march on the Feldherrnhalle. The movement's figureheads are either in prison - or in hiding. The NSDAP was banned and its assets seized. The party is bankrupt. Göring sends Lüdecke to a Nazi meeting in Salzburg to reorganize the National Socialists and raise new funds. Lüdecke again resorts to his tried and tested recipe, gets Hitler's

"Legitimation" from his pocket and has Göring additionally confirm in handwriting: "Lüdecke is acting on my behalf. Support."

In Salzburg, the Nazi ambassador met Hanfstaengl, Hermann Esser, Freikorps leader Gerhard Rossbach, Lieutenant-Captain Hoffmann from the SA and other scattered Nazis with his self-made diploma card.

"Our situation was completely bleak. Nobody had any money to spare or the means to raise any," Lüdecke later said about the situation in Austria,

"we discussed wild projects to solve the money problem."³⁴ The comrades wanted to print flyers, smuggle them across the border to Bavaria and distribute them secretly there in order to denounce the vile betrayal of the Bavarian State Commissioner General Gustav Ritter von Kahr against Hitler and thus raise the morale of the Nazi members and persuade them to donate. The "Völkischer Beobachter" was also to be financially secured for the future, at least in the background.

Lüdecke makes a detour to Vienna for one of these wild projects. He meets up with his friend Dr. Philipp von Langehan, a handsome old-school cavalier whose success with women Lüdecke admires. Langehan takes his partner to dinner at the Sacher Hotel and introduces him to a prince of the former Habsburg Empire. The nobleman makes an adventurous proposal: Lüdecke should sell counterfeit French francs with a face value of 100 and 1,000 francs abroad. The commission to be paid for this would be large enough "to solve the urgent and desperate situation of the Nazi assets", as Lüdecke registered. The banknotes were to be printed at the Military Topographical Institute in Hungary. But the potential counterfeit money fence was too afraid, having already been targeted by investigators as a possible spy for France. He says no

and quickly returns to Salzburg. There, a dispute broke out between German and Austrian party supporters. "The same conditions that had already made any productive work impossible in the past - mutual distrust, slander and selfishness - also made the attempt by the Austrian regional leadership to rebuild the Bavarian party from Salzburg impossible," a Munich police report, apparently based on informer reports, notes with relish⁽³⁵⁾ Hoffmann and Esser aired their differences among themselves, just as they both turned against Austrian Nazis. The Salzburg lawyer Hawlitschek, a student friend of Kahrs, marches to the Salzburg police headquarters at Hoffmann's instigation and requests Esser's expulsion. Bacher, the regional chairman for Salzburg, also commented critically on Esser's activities. The scolded man then leaves for Klagenfurt via Innsbruck. But that was not enough of the petty intrigues. Hoffmann's denunciations were met with resentment by the other party members and accusations rained down. Hoffmann reacted angrily with a letter of complaint to Alfred Rosenberg, the editor-in-chief of the "Völkischer Beobachter" and interim NSDAP chairman appointed by Hitler. In it, Hoffmann declares that he is resigning from all offices and refuses any involvement in the party "for all time", as he cannot have "any fellowship with notorious slanderers and slashers of honor". The Salzburg leadership, in turn, complained that the Munichers were not supporting their own fortnightly party newspaper with articles: "Rosenberg has not contributed a single line to this paper for six weeks." The newspaper is published by Verlag Volksruf, Getreidegasse 3, and constantly changes the title in order to circumvent a ban by the authorities. The paper is distributed by couriers in Bavaria.

The atmosphere in Salzburg was poisoned by the resentment. Despite the internal strife, Lüdecke and the Nazi exiles at least managed to raise funds from their Austrian sympathizers. However, the Nazis soon came to blows over this issue too, as the police recorded: "As far as the money collections are concerned, they have been stopped in Salzburg, as there is no clear evidence of how the 34 million crowns already collected and delivered have been used and no success is apparent. According to the receipt received from Salzburg:

Esser	2½ million crowns,
Hoffmann	1¼ million crowns,
Neunzert	500,000 crowns,
Rosenberg	7 million crowns,
Schneider	800,000 crowns,
Hanfstaengl	1 million crowns,

Baldenius	500,000 crowns,
Körber	500,000 crowns,
Henrici	500,000 crowns,
Drexler	80 dollars."

The report continues: "Salzburg will no longer be in a position to provide support for the next few months, and the continuation of the newspaper for Bavaria is no longer possible, as the publishing house is already burdened with an uncovered debt of 15 million crowns."³⁶ The comrades even allow themselves a side blow to the greed of Hitler's deputy in office: "Rittmeister von Körber was also repeatedly in Salzburg and brought 7 million crowns to Munich for the 'Völkischer Beobachter', of which Rosenberg used three and a half million crowns for himself alone."

The money he earns is not enough for the party's work. Lüdecke therefore hatches a plan to make use of his proven contacts abroad: he wants to find new sources of money in the United States. The comrades in Austria are enthusiastic about the hobby ambassador's visions, especially because Lüdecke wants to travel at his own expense. He demands - and receives - a new "diplomatic passport" for his self-sacrificing mission in the tried and tested manner. According to the letterhead, the document with Lüdecke's passport photo was issued by the National Socialist Party of Greater Germany, Vienna, 6th district, Matrosengasse 9, telephone no. 75.81. The "authorization and legitimation" bears the following wording:

"Mr. Kurt Georg Luedecke, born February 5, 1890 in Berlin, is hereby entrusted with the representation of the National Socialist Party of Greater Germany in the United States of North America. Mr. Luedecke is authorized to initiate collections for the National Socialist Party of Greater Germany and to accept donations of any amount. Amounts of money can also be transferred to the bank account 'Germaniaspende' Wiener Bankverein. We request that Mr. Luedecke be acknowledged in this capacity and that he be supported in word and deed at all times on his propaganda tour."³⁷

The letter with stamp and several signatures is exactly to Lüdecke's taste - it gives the owner the desired official aura. Nevertheless, he was not satisfied: the king's accolade for his crusade was missing. Lüdecke therefore contacts Lorenz Roder in Munich, Hitler's defense lawyer in the trial that the Nazi leader is facing for the failed putsch and the march on the Feldherrnhalle. Roder delivers Lüdecke's wishes to the imprisoned Hitler in Landsberg. The failed putschist immediately leaves a letter on the stationery.

pier Rodgers, smuggled out of prison by the lawyer and sent to his financial agent in Salzburg on January 4, 1924:

"Dear Mr. Lüdecke!

First of all, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to you for your representation of the movement in Italy and ask you to promote the interests of the German freedom movement in North America and in particular to collect funds for this purpose. I ask you to first receive these funds personally and, if possible, to bring them over personally. Thanking you in advance for your efforts, I send you my warmest regards.

Yours sincerely, Adolf Hitler"³⁸

Hitler's letter is remarkable in that in later years he always publicly denied having requested funds from abroad. This paper proves the opposite. It also shows that the NSDAP chairman continues to stand by the headstrong bon vivant and entrusts him with delicate foreign assignments. Lüdecke now holds the coveted identity card with the prominent signature, which ennobles him as an important person. After all, the globetrotter knows how valuable such official-looking documents can be. This soon became apparent when Lüdecke embarked for America in mid-January 1924.

On board the "Amerika", which departs from Bremerhaven, is not only the Nazi emissary, but German celebrities are also among the passengers: Siegfried and Winifred Wagner. This is no coincidence - Lüdecke knows about the Wagners' planned concert tour and the date of their journey. So he simply books the same passage. With the recommendation of the imprisoned Nazi dictator as his trump card, he quickly wins the couple's trust and establishes himself as their companion for the United States. The composer's son with the melodious name and even more so his English-born wife Winifred, née Williams, adore Hitler. Winifred even sends him food parcels and writing paper for "Mein Kampf" shortly before they leave for the USA. The Wagners want to actively support Lüdecke's fundraising activities and even look for donors on the other side of the Atlantic. Something better could hardly happen to Lüdecke: The prominent figureheads will be like an open sesame to potential financiers.

In New York, in the Wagners' suite at the Waldorf Hotel, the small travel group makes plans. "I was sitting here, talking to the man for whose recovery the incomparable 'Siegfried Idyll' had been composed - and we hardly mentioned any music!" recalls Lüdecke. The conversation was much more mundane: "We discussed money."³⁹The Nazi confidant suggested that he try his luck again with Henry Ford, for whom Lüdecke was already a fan.

and with whom the deceased Hitler friend Dietrich Eckart had already successfully cultivated his relationships. Lüdecke sets off with the Wag- ners on the train to Detroit: The success of the money acquisition depends on, "that Mrs. Ford would invite them as her guests. The rest of the plot was obvious - a word in Mr. Ford's presence, a hint, a request."

The plan works: as soon as they arrive at the Statler Hotel in Detroit, the group finds a written invitation from the car tycoon. They go to a concert together that evening. The next day, Ford's secretary collects Lüdecke from the hotel for a private audience at nine o'clock in the morning and drives him to Ford's office at his anti-Semitic daily newspaper "Dearborn Independent". The German is excited: "I'm going to see Henry Ford, the multi-millionaire. With the stroke of a pen, he could solve the Nazis' money problem. More than that, if he shows enough vision and good will, he could give us enough prestige to push our program through like a battering ram. How could I impress this man so much with my cause that he would put a fraction of his fortune at Hitler's disposal?"⁴⁰

The car boss greets Lüdecke in a friendly manner and invites him to take a tour of his laboratory. After a while, the company boss leads his visitor into an open room and closes the door. Ford sits down in an armchair, places one leg on the desk and begins the conversation. The guest describes the state of the Nazi movement in Germany, the inevitability of Hitler's rise to power and the need for individual men to intervene in history. Ford nods approvingly, drops a brief interjection: "I know ... Yes, the Jews, those sneaky Jews ..." Lüdecke carefully steers the topic to the National Socialists' need for money and the desire for a far-sighted sponsor. Moreover, whoever helps the German right-wing radicals now is also acting wisely from an economic point of view: "If Ford assures us concrete support - that's all we need to bring Germany under control - a binding agreement could be arranged in which large business concessions would be guaranteed, in Germany and elsewhere, as soon as Hitler is in power," Lüdecke generously issues a switch to the future. After a while, Ford stands up and leads the German to his publishing manager: "Talk to Mr. Cameron about this."

But the negotiations with Ford's confidant do not lead to any tangible results. Lüdecke had to return to Germany without a check. However, the attempt is nothing else: Henry Ford supports Hitler and the NSDAP. But the main trigger was probably the decisive commitment of Siegfried and

Winifred Wagner for Hitler. The two also received a private invitation to a dinner at Fair Lane, Ford's 800-hectare private estate. Ford lectured the musician couple on the growing influence of the Jews in America, the communist danger in Europe and the Jews' domination of the press. Winifred Wagner remembers: "Ford's and Hitler's philosophies and ideas were very similar." When they talk about Hitler, the Wagner daughter-in-law is amazed that "Ford was very well informed about everything that was going on in Germany. He knew everything about the National Socialist movement."⁴¹ Winifred Wagner lets it slip that Hitler now needed money particularly urgently. Ford smiles and says that he is still prepared to support someone like Hitler who is working towards the liberation of Germany from the Jews.

Lüdecke is back in Munich in May 1924 - before that, he has made an extensive stopover at the casino in Monaco. He obtains permission to visit the prison in Landsberg, where he reports to his employer about his trip to America. Hitler is wearing Bavarian lederhosen and a Tyrolean jacket, his shirt open at the neck. The Nazi leader does not dwell on the subject of money for long. During his imprisonment, the political climate has changed, inflation has been defeated with the introduction of the new currency and the economy is stabilizing. The party leader has also moved other issues to the fore: "I won't be staying here for long," Hitler believes he is sure of the authorities' goodwill, "when I resume active work, it will be necessary to pursue a new policy. Instead of gaining power through an armed coup d'état, we must hold our noses and conquer the Reichstag against the Catholic and Marxist deputies. Even if it takes longer to outvote them than to shoot them down, the results will at least be guaranteed by their own constitution!"⁴² Surprised by his interlocutor's change of heart, Lüdecke leaves Landsberg again.

Without Hitler's patronage, the US returnee meets with little response from his old comrades. The mistrust of the past could still be felt. The Nazi camarilla itself was at odds with each other, and the interim party leader Alfred Rosenberg was hardly accepted by the members. The agony following the failed putsch and the conviction of a large part of the leadership soaked the mood and paralyzed activities. This only changed when Hitler's prophecy was fulfilled and he was released early from Landsberg prison on December 20, 1924 - four years earlier than the sentence of spring 1924 had stipulated. The secret sympathy of the right-wing Bavarian government for the traitor turned into open support with this act. The political leaders even went one better: in mid-February 1925, they lifted

They lifted the ban on the NSDAP in mid-February 1925 and the "Völkischer Beobachter" reappeared. Hitler can once again feel like the sun in the radical right-wing political system.

Without hesitation, the resurrected NSDAP leader sets about rebuilding and reorganizing the party. After the confiscation of the Nazi assets, one thing is lacking above all: money. The main propaganda weapon, the "Völkischer Beobachter", needed a financial boost. He wanted to use Lüdecke to improve the paper's presence in the Reich capital. "You are the best man to spread the 'Beobachter' in Berlin. We have to march into Berlin," Hitler says to his foreign representative, "that's a hard task, but I know you can do it. Besides, I need an intelligent observer in the capital whose judgment I can trust. You can also work in the background as my representative."⁴³Lüdecke moved to Berlin in April 1925.

The newly appointed publishing manager and secret Hitler spy does not stop at working for the newspaper. Lüdecke pursues his old habit and tries to make closer contacts with other Nazi bigwigs for his own benefit. He made friends with the Baltic German Arno Schickedanz and met regularly with Erich Röhm and Gregor Strasser, the leader of the social-revolutionary wing of the NSDAP and one of Hitler's opponents in the party. This did not go unnoticed by the Nazi functionaries and Lüdecke's activities were met with anger at party headquarters. Economically, the business of the "Völkischer Beobachter" in Berlin did not really want to continue, and the climate between Lüdecke and his formal boss Max Amann in Munich became increasingly frosty.

Lüdecke quickly realizes that his career prospects in the party in Germany are slim and that his days as a fundraiser are numbered. He asks Hitler to resign from his job. The former foreign representative wants to return abroad, back to America. "During my long absence, I have somehow outgrown the German rhythm - not enough to feel like a foreigner here, but enough to develop a slight impatience with typical German ways of thinking and acting," Lüdecke tells the NSDAP leader, explaining his wish. "It makes me boil when some idiots indignantly criticize me, saying I can't be a Nazi because I drive a cab and wear a gold watch."⁴⁴Hitler lets him go. At the beginning of 1926, Lüdecke traveled to the United States again. His job as a discreet organizer of funds abroad was over. He disappears from the political spotlight of the party.

Lüdecke had played his part in the rise of the Nazi movement and Hitler

and Hitler, successfully raised funds and always went his own way - a bird of paradise among vultures. That would actually be the end of his story. But Lüdecke sets off once again and believes he can once again play a decisive role for Nazi Germany. The world traveler thus fatally opens another act in this play, which, however, should end differently than he imagines.

In the USA, the playboy does something quite unusual - he gets married. In Detroit in 1927, he met Mildred, a library employee. He takes her out for a walk and they spend two hours together. On the fourth day, he cooks Mulligan Stew for himself and Mildred, for dessert there is a kiss and a proposal: "I see no reason why I shouldn't marry you," says Lüdecke. "Yes, why not?" replies Mildred. Three days later, they are husband and wife. Mildred's parents have no idea about the lightning wedding. The husband describes his wife as follows: "She wasn't beautiful, maybe not even pretty. But she was aesthetically pleasing and gracefully feminine, intelligent and real."⁴⁵ What is the reason that the bon vivant suddenly becomes a househusband? By marrying an American woman, he hoped to gain citizenship in his new adopted country. But his calculations were not to work out for the rest of his life: Due to Lüdecke's criminal record, the US authorities refused to grant him naturalization.

Lüdecke did not last long in his married life either. Just a few months after the wedding, he left for New York alone. Even later, he always leaves Mildred at home when he travels. In Manhattan, Lüdecke tries his hand as a tourism manager. A contact informs him of the arrival of a German couple at the Plaza Hotel. Lüdecke senses prey. He calls - and is promptly invited to lunch. The hosts: Günther Quandt, the rich entrepreneur, and his wife Magda. Lüdecke is particularly taken with Mrs. Quandt. He talks about his previous work: "Her eyes shone when I told her about Hitler and the Nazi heroes," Lüdecke recalls. As a farewell gift, he received an invitation to Berlin. In the summer of 1930, he accepted the invitation and met Mrs. Quandt privately at her home in Berlin. Only now the lady is no longer called Quandt, but Magda Goebbels after her divorce and remarriage. Apparently the two have a brief affair⁽⁴⁶⁾.

During his short trip to Germany at the end of August and beginning of September 1930, he attempted to visit other Nazi functionaries and to break his relations - in vain. Hitler is not available. In 1932, the electoral success of the NSDAP drew Lüdecke back to Germany in June, hoping to get his share of the political sinecures that were apparently soon to be distributed.

He again meets Magda Goebbels, the wife of the Reich propaganda chief

Joseph Goebbels. Lüdecke used the relationship of trust to make good weather with Hitler through this contact. With success: the US returnee met with the party dictator several times at the Kaiserhof Hotel in Berlin and in Hitler's private apartment on Prinzregentenplatz in Munich. Lüdecke's current business idea, to which Hitler is to give his approval: Lüdecke wants to establish a foreign policy representation in Washington at the party's expense, a Nazi DAP embassy with him as chief diplomat. The Nazi leader approved the plan and promised his American envoy the necessary funds. And Lüdecke receives something else: another paper for his collection of credentials, a "Vollmacht-Legitimation", which authorizes him to "represent the NSDAP in foreign policy" in America, Canada and Mexico, signed by Alfred Rosenberg.

Lüdecke does not last long in his new post in the USA. The news of Hitler's appointment as Reich Chancellor on January 30, 1933, drives the elected American back to his old homeland. Now seems to be the time to cash in on his past services and secure a lucrative position. But things turn out differently.

At a meeting in the Reich Chancellery, Lüdecke presents his idea to the Nazi Chancellor: a post at the German embassy in Washington, this time all official and genuine, not just with auxiliary documents, but a real diplomatic passport, which gives Lüdecke prestige and immunity. And, of course, a decent salary and a generous expense account. Hitler signals his approval if Rosenberg, the NSDAP press chief Walther Funk and Rudolf Hess give the green light. Lüdecke immediately arranges meetings with the Nazi grandees and tries to win Magda Goebbels and her husband over to his cause.

Lüdecke's success in raising money among German entrepreneurs and managers in April 1933 made the greatest impression on Hitler - it was to be Lüdecke's last job in this direction. His friend Rosenberg and he invited him to lunch at the Kaiserhof Hotel, the residence of Hitler and his entourage in Berlin. "Here they were - the elite of the most important non-Jews in industry, commerce, finance, agriculture, transport and banking," says Lüdecke in retrospect, "I saw the irony in our willingness to mobilize the very forces against which the socialist goals of the Nazi revolution were directed. Here we were, trying to make a revolution with the help of our enemies!"⁴⁷Rosenberg sits at the head of the table, flanked by the white-haired king of cannons Gustav Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach and the newly appointed Reichsbank president Hjalmar Schacht, whom Rosenberg had described just a few years earlier as an "exponent of the international financial industry" and a "leader of the international financial industry".

"criminals against the German people". The participants also included Privy Councillor Hermann Schmitz, who later became Chairman of the

of IG Farben, and Consul General Kiep from the Hamburg-America Line. A quick menu with several courses is served, Lüdecke takes care of it, "that the wine glasses are not refilled too often" to keep the older business tycoons clear-headed for what follows. After a speech by the Baltic German, Lüdecke outlines Germany's problems abroad, especially in the United States, in a short speech. But for effective counter-propaganda, the NSDAP needed a field office in America - and that would cost money, a lot of money. "I emphasized that their own material and personal interests required immediate, intelligent and far-reaching action, without action they would lose everything in a preventive war," said Lüdecke, dramatically exaggerating. "Voluntary and generous contributions now would not only do a great service to our beloved country, but also to them personally." The speaker lets his words sink in, individual guests express their agreement. Coffee, liqueur and cigars make the rounds. Lüdecke goes to Schacht with a list of donations and has him sign it: "The list began to circulate and I circulated with it, so there was no escaping it. Just over a million marks were donated."⁴⁸

With this coup, Lüdecke believes he has secured his first-class ticket to the United States. A mistake. On May 9, 1933, two gentlemen await him in the foyer of the "Kaiserhof". As it soon turns out, they are from the recently established Secret State Police, the Gestapo. They arrest Lüdecke without telling him why, and put him in a prison run by the Schutzpolizei. Only later does he learn that he is in the cell on the orders of Hermann Göring. The exact reasons for his arrest remain unclear, but one reason is on the table: Lüdecke is said to have blackmailed a German doctor in New York into reporting him for an abortion. The juicy thing is that his party friend from earlier Munich days, Ernst Hanfstaengl, known as "Putzi", got the ball rolling. In the meantime, he has mutated into Lüdecke's intimate enemy, constantly trying to blacken him as an impostor. The reasons are complex: both are competing for Hitler's favor, Hanfstaengl, who has spent several years in America, sees his chances for a post abroad threatened by Lüdecke's ambitions for the USA. In any case, the incriminating material ended up in Hanfstaengl's hands: "I dutifully passed it on to the top".⁴⁹ He hoped to eliminate his opponent once and for all. To be on the safe side, he passes the information on to an American journalist. In the "New Yorker Staatszeitung" of

May 12, 1933 an article under the headline "Lüdecke arrested on charges of imposture and extortion".

But Hitler once again protects Lüdecke and orders Göring to release his prisoner and apologize in person. "Oh, Lüdecke, take it with humor, not so tragic," Göring fulfills his onerous duty as he has Lüdecke brought into his office, "you're a pretty unusual guy in Nazi terms. Forget what happened."⁵⁰ But Lüdecke could not forget; on the contrary, he sought revenge on his opponent Hanfstaengl. The released man hired the Berlin lawyer Alfons Sack, an NSDAP member and SS man, and sought a trial before the Supreme Party Court. At the same time, Lüdecke tries to secure allies in his case. He conspires with Rosenberg, Hess and Röhm. He speaks to Hitler, but he reacts gruffly and advises Lüdecke to drop the matter and disappear to Washington. The decision is imminent: a court hearing is scheduled for July 15, 1933. On July 5, 1933, at 6:30 in the morning, Lüdecke is again arrested by the Gestapo in his apartment.

"Protective custody" - this time on the orders of Adolf Hitler himself. The Reich Chancellor had his former fundraiser sent to Plötzensee prison without the prisoner being given the opportunity to justify himself. At the beginning of September 1933, Lüdecke was even sent to Brandenburg concentration camp. There he was confronted with an environment that was pretty much the opposite of the luxury he was used to: wake-up calls at 4.15 in the morning, coffee with dry bread for breakfast, a sink for ten prisoners, drills under the supervision of the SS guards. The only diversion for the exhausted bon vivant was a game of chess with his prominent fellow inmate Erich Mühsam, the Jewish writer and member of the revolutionary Munich Workers' Council in 1918.

Lüdecke knows that he has gone too far with his desire for revenge and therefore writes a letter of apology to Hitler, in which he admits in a submissive tone that he "acted against the beat and rhythm of the movement without intention". But the prisoner did not receive a reply; instead, he was transferred to Oranienburg concentration camp at the beginning of 1934, the place of his childhood - on February 5, his 44th birthday.

Lüdecke hoped for better treatment in Oranienburg. He helped himself a little with his usual trick: he simulated a nervous breakdown in Brandenburg concentration camp and was admitted to the infirmary. He managed to persuade the camp commandant Grutzeck to issue him a "certificate" dated January 29, 1934 with the following lines: "The protective custody prisoner Kurt Luedecke is a long-time member of the NSDAP and has become so mentally and emotionally depressed as a result of his imprisonment that he had to be admitted to the infirmary, where he remains to this day.

It would be desirable if Luedecke could also be admitted to the military hospital in the concentration camp there."⁵¹ This helps. The NSDAP member Lüdecke received preferential treatment in Oranienburg and was allowed to stay in the first aid station. Even better: on February 19, 1934, he was granted a one-day leave of absence, which he used to visit Rosenberg in Berlin - always accompanied by a guard. The evening before his return to the concentration camp, Lüdecke celebrates with his guard in the "Zigeunerkeller" on Kurftirstendamm with music, Szegediner Gu- lasch and Tokai wine.

On his second release on March 1, 1934, Lüdecke decided to escape, driven by uncertainty about his future fate in Oranienburg. The concentration camp prisoner is able to shake off his companion in Berlin. Lüdecke gets on the next train to the Czech border. He is chauffeured the last few kilometers by a cab - to freedom.

From Geneva, Lüdecke stirred again; on April 10, 1934, he sent a six-and-a-half-page letter to Hitler, with copies to Rosenberg, Magda Goebbels and Amann. In the letter, he admonishes Hitler "that you in particular must exercise special caution towards me before you allow such a cruel injustice" to be inflicted on me. Lüdecke takes a swipe at Hitler's opponent Hanfstaengl, who "not only incited and schemed against me in an unqualifiable and punishable manner, but also occasionally adopted a very questionable attitude towards you". The fugitive demanded his "complete rehabilitation and satisfaction", which he would "enforce" if necessary if nothing happened in 14 days. In this case, the Reich Chancellor would have to "draw the consequences in every respect", according to Lüdecke, and he confesses "frankly that I - weighing up all eventualities - have arranged and secured myself accordingly"⁽⁵²⁾.

It doesn't take much imagination to interpret this polished letter as an exhortation. And that is probably how it is meant. The successful money collector feels unfairly treated, humiliated, cheated out of his well-earned wages. Now he wants satisfaction. This becomes apparent in the following years, after Lüdecke returns to the United States in July 1934. A silent battle begins behind the scenes: The Nazi rulers consider discrediting the recalcitrant deserter with targeted publications about his "criminal past". Hanfstaengl in particular sought further incriminating material on his own initiative, but was rudely brushed aside by Hitler. Lüdecke, for his part, threatened to reveal what he knew about the innermost circle of power. The brown dictator in Germany takes this very seriously - after all, the globetrotter is known as an avid collector of information. At the end of December, Lüdecke gave Reichsbank President Hjalmar

Schacht a pack of explosive documents to Berlin and sent a "proposal", which sounds more like a blackmailing ultimatum. According to this, an apology must be published in the "Völkischer Beobachter" and "compensation of 50,000 dollars" is due, of which "at least 25,000 dollars in cash" and the rest in "first-class quality goods". If these demands are not met, Lüdecke will "proceed unscrupulously and ruthlessly with all means to take revenge on his enemies". It would be easy,

"to bring his entire case before the great public in the most sensational way in a large public trial, which would of course be a scandal of the first order" and "especially cause great damage to Hitler's prestige". As a personal protection, the letter writer warns against

"to want to remove him by force or render him harmless", as he had "secured himself in every respect" as a precaution and had "good arguments in his hands on the basis of his documentary evidence with photographs"⁽⁵³⁾.

Hitler recognized the explosive nature of the matter and immediately ordered a reply from Philipp Bouhler, the head of the Nazi leader's chancellery, to Lüdecke's intermediary. The letter, dated January 12, 1935, reads: "I ask you to inform Mr. Lüdecke that his matter will be dealt with by me as quickly as possible. You may rest assured that everything will be done here to settle the matter."⁵⁴ The two parties obviously reached an agreement, because Lüdecke kept quiet for the next few years. But in 1937/38 he unexpectedly reappeared in public - with a book of revelations entitled

"I knew Hitler". However, the work did not trigger the hoped-for wave of indignation. In November 1938, the German embassy in Washington wrote to the Foreign Office in Berlin that Lüdecke had, according to his own statements, "finally retired from politics and intended in future to live only for himself"⁽⁵⁵⁾.

Once again, Lüdecke tried to extract money: he suggested to the embassy in Washington that they acquire his book rights for a "substantial" amount because there was "a German interest" in "preventing the further distribution of the book".⁵⁶ But Hitler was not deterred and rejected all further demands. The playboy and fundraiser thus disappeared from the Nazi stage - this time for good.



EMIL KIRDORF

The string-puller

An unusual crowd has gathered at the Rheinelbe coal mine in Gelsenkirchen on July 16, 1938. Work is at a standstill. Instead of soot-smeared miners, there are men in suits and starched shirts at the pit. A coffin sits enthroned in the middle, adorned with countless wreaths. Flags fly at half-mast on the winding towers, as they do throughout the Rhenish-Westphalian district. The Bochum municipal orchestra plays the second movement of Ludwig van Beethoven's Eroica. In his speech, the Reich Minister of Economics, Walther Funk, paid tribute to the deceased as "Germany's first National Socialist business leader" and "an enthusiastic admirer and loyal friend of our Führer Adolf Hitler". The speaker pointed out that the deceased was "not only a champion of the political ideals of National Socialism", "but he also lived and fought for the economic and social ideals that the Führer gave the German people". Reich Chancellor Adolf Hitler steps forward, lays a wreath and pauses briefly in prayer. The words of Gauleiter Westfalen-Nord Alfred Meyer echo across the square: "The Führer and Chancellor of the German Reich personally pays his last respects to the dead follower. This is probably the highest honor and distinction that can be bestowed on a dead German man." The Singe-Gemeinschaft Rheinelbe performs Goethe's "Über allen Wipfeln ist Ruh", the Deutschlandlied and the Horst-Wessel-Lied are sung.

sound, a final "Sieg Heil!" The coffin leaves the colliery on a carriage.

The ceremony is dedicated to a man who died three days earlier at the age of 91 in his home in Mülheim an der Ruhr: Emil Kirdorf, a legend of the Ruhr region. Hitler wrote to the bereaved in a telegram of condolence: "I will never forget the services that the deceased rendered to the German economy and the rebuilding of our nation."¹ There are more than just propaganda reasons for bowing down to the deceased: Emil Kirdorf, the "Schlotbaron", opened the doors to the top echelons of the German business elite for the Nazi dictator more than any other business leader long before he came to power, bringing the really big money within reach of the NSDAP leader. Kirdorf helped to "make the future dictator socially acceptable in the eyes of millions of Germans during his rise to power"; through his public advocacy of the Nazis and his support, "he helped the Führer immeasurably"⁽²⁾.

Hitler knows what he owes to the elderly manager. After seizing power, the Reich Chancellor visited the prominent business leader at home several times, sitting at the coffee table with his family. Kirdorf, of short stature, with a bald head and full beard, received the admired demagogue in the uniform of an SS officer - a rank that Hitler had awarded him on an honorary basis. A strange outfit: the gnarled, belligerent manager, who always asserts his interests rigorously and spends his life fighting opponents of all kinds, voluntarily demotes himself to a soldier of Hitler's mercies. Kirdorf speaks blissfully of "my friend Adolf Hitler, whose selfless national devotion I know and admire".³ The Führer maintains his valuable contact: On Kirdorf's 90th birthday, he presented him with the eagle shield, the highest civilian award of the Third Reich, as well as the NSDAP's golden badge of honor, which only "old fighters" were allowed to wear. For his part, Kirdorf, an admirer of Bismarck, hangs an oil painting of Adolf Hitler in his study.

At first glance, it seems paradoxical that the calculating Nazi tyrant should pay so much attention to an old man who had resigned from almost all his offices and retired to his old age. But Kirdorf, 42 years older than Hitler, had excellent connections to practically all of the country's major industrialists. This is invaluable. Having worked in the coal and steel industry for over 50 years, the manager has built up a network of connections in this world that can be put to excellent use for political and financial campaigns. And the nimbus of the Kirdorf name does the rest, even among the younger generation of business tycoons. After all, there is a Kirdorf street in Essen, and his company has shaped a

his company mints a "Kirdorf memorial coin", a mine is named after him, as is a ship that sails for the Stinnes shipping company.

Kirdorf is a wanderer between two worlds. In the new era after the First World War, the businessman experienced the upheavals in politics, culture and economics. In terms of his views and ideals, however, his spiritual home is in the late 19th century, in the feudal order with the emperor and the iron chancellor Bismarck, with the shirt-sleeved Manchester capitalism of industrialization. The company boss himself is writing a piece of German industrial history.

Emil Kirdorf was born on April 8, 1847 in the small Bergisch town of Mettmann. It was the eve of the German revolution and signs of the approaching bourgeois freedom movement were everywhere. Emil was never to meet his father Martin Kirdorf - a few months after his birth, his father and Emil's eldest brother fell victim to a typhoid epidemic. But Emil and his second brother Adolph seemed to have a carefree future ahead of them: Martin Kirdorf leaves behind a weaving mill that has enabled the family to live in prosperity until now. Their mother Amalie Kirdorf, née Dickes, who came from a farm near Mettmann, moved the company headquarters to Düsseldorf. She follows the advice of Emil Strohn, the company's managing director. The junior attends Krumbach's private school in his new place of residence for three years, transferring to the Realschule in 1856. The older brother Adolph is regarded as talented and ambitious, while the pupil Emil is described as comfortable and too independent for his age, as well as being prone to violent outbursts of emotion, a character trait that was to remain a prominent feature.

His mother naturally envisaged a career in the textile industry for her offspring Emil; he would one day follow in his father's footsteps and run his parents' company. The boy complies with this wish: in October 1863 he attends the weaving school in Mülheim am Rhein, a year later he completes a commercial apprenticeship in his own company, Bürberg & Kirdorf, after which the future factory owner goes to the export and import company Eduard Richter in Hamburg for a year as a sales assistant. Another opportunity arises: Relatives lived in Krefeld who had no children of their own, so Emil Kirdorf could hope for a share in their company. So the apprentice moves to Krefeld to work in the fabric trade

W. Brüning. There, the 22-year-old meets 19-year-old Mathilde Kauert, a girl from a wealthy family who looks older with her high-necked dresses and her hair pulled back tightly. The two decide to get married.

But a shocking experience destroys the hopes of the newly in love: the former company Bürberg & Kirdorf has to file for bankruptcy. Managing Director Strohn shoots himself because he cannot bear the shame. What had happened? The company manager, like many others with him, had simply slept through the technical revolution. The mechanical loom from England quickly put an end to all weaving mills that relied on good old manual labor. This was because machine production now made products unrivaled in terms of price; even if the quality did not stand up to hand-woven goods, customers preferred to go for the cheap offer. Too late, Strohn realizes his failure and tries to convert the business to modern machines with the help of loans. The debts grow. Amalie Kirdorf, who knows little about business, trusts her employee and does not intervene. The bankruptcy is unstoppable. The crisis in the Kirdorf household worsens: the creditors cling to their mother and nothing remains of the once stately household's assets. Son Emil, who already saw his carefree life as a wealthy upper-class entrepreneur ahead of him, is left with nothing.

Worse still, he and his brother Adolph now had to support their destitute mother. And marriage to the adored Ma- thilde is now out of the question - according to the strict social conventions of the 19th century, it is considered impossible for a poor cloth merchant to marry a lady from a good family and lack the money for her well-being and security. A world collapses for Emil Kirdorf. The frustration at the end of his parents' business runs so deep that the young man no longer wants to work as an entrepreneur himself, but only as an employee - even though his skills would later have made him a successful producer and industrialist and he would probably have joined the ranks of the country's truly wealthy propertied elite. But Emil Kirdorf bids farewell to self-employment forever. At that time, he also chose his motto for life: "I'll get by, I'll get by!" He later even had this saying engraved on silver cups and gave them to friends as gifts.

A new job is needed. As a cloth merchant at Brüning, he earned too little and, as he said, this industry was too risky. Two years later, at the age of 24, he receives an offer that turns his future life around: he can start as commercial manager of the Holland Mining Company in Wattenscheid. The young Kirdorf owes the fact that he gets this job to a special talent that he consciously uses and from which he benefits throughout his professional career: his ability to establish contacts and maintain connections - coupled with a great rhetorical talent, such as that of the young Adolf Hitler.

Emil's brother Adolph is the trigger for the mining job. He is already the technical director of a weaving mill when he actually receives the offer for the Holland colliery. The siblings stick together: At Emil's insistence, Adolph magnanimously relinquishes the job and leaves it to his brother instead. Emil, a complete novice when it comes to mining, manages to convince the company's board of directors of his abilities. But there is an almost insurmountable obstacle to his commitment - the mine owners demand a deposit of 10,000 thalers, an adventurous sum for a penniless newcomer. Emil Kirdorf is again able to enlist the support of an acquaintance for his cause. A Mr. Pelizaeus, a friend of the family of his dream woman Mathilde Kauert, vouches for the money demanded. On November 8, 1871, Emil Kirdorf starts his job at the Holland colliery. His livelihood now seems secure. He asks Mathilde to marry him. They marry on July 24, 1872. Coming from a Catholic family, but brought up in the Protestant faith by his pious mother, Kirdorf is not much of a believer in traditional religions. Instead, he joins a Mennonite sect, to which his wife also belongs. Even the wedding ceremony is performed by a sect pastor.

The leap from the textile business to the coal industry could hardly be more dramatic. At the time, the mining of "black gold" was seen as a booming industry of the future, comparable to the production of silicon wafers for computer chips today. After all, coal is the carrier of progress, the engine that accelerates the change from an agrarian society to an industrial society. In a short space of time, there is a small migration of people from the countryside to the cities and factories. New technologies change the mining of the energy source; the steam engine replaces adit mining in favor of deep mining shafts, hard coal replaces the charcoal that had been common for centuries. In 1851, 142 steam engines with a total output of 9,845 hp were in operation in the Ruhr area; by 1906, 6,200 steam engines with over 800,000 hp were in use. The coke blast furnace also enables the mass production of iron: 77,000 tons of pig iron are produced in 1851, rising to 18 million tons of pig iron and ten million tons of steel in 1913. In the decades that followed, coal and iron ensured the rise of German companies to the top of the European league - a development that would continue well into the 20th century.

In the last century, the new industries attracted speculators from home and abroad who wanted to make a quick buck from mining - a mechanism that still works in the same way in the 21st century. The only difference is that today the industries may be called biotechnology, software or pharmaceuticals. Banks emerge as financiers who provide the industries with money and loans. The legal form of the public limited company is flourishing, because it allows fast

and, in case of doubt, anonymous change of ownership. The price fluctuations on the stock exchange show that the phenomenon of share gamblers is already pronounced early on: Vereinigte Bonifacius, for example, is listed at a price of 151 per share in 1873, the share price falls to 35 by 1877; Bergwerksgesellschaft König Wilhelm plummets from 127 to 14 in the same period.

Emil Kirdorf quickly feels the effects of the Wild West manners. His director's title counted for little; the Dutch owner of the shop was in charge, meticulously monitoring every expense and encouraging the employees to spy on each other. Kirdorf avoids the harassment by doing practically everything himself - from the accounts and negotiations to writing letters. But the atmosphere becomes increasingly unbearable and the mining newcomer would like to change jobs. But how - and where?

Kirdorf turns to a man he has gotten to know in the meantime, Heinrich Müller, the director of Horster Eisen- und Stahlwerke. Kirdorf is able to win the manager over to his cause. Müller recommends the young manager to the industrial powerhouse Friedrich Grillo, at the time the most influential entrepreneurial figure in the Ruhr region. Kirdorf makes an impression at the job interview, as well as during his visits to the Chairman of the Board of Directors Adolph von Hansemann, head of the Berlin financial institution Discontogesellschaft. Kirdorf's ability to win people over pays off. In March 1873, he is appointed to the board of the newly founded Gelsenkirchener Bergwerks-Aktiengesellschaft (GBAG). The contract with an indefinite term provides for a salary of 2,000 thalers a year, plus a bonus of half a percent of the net profit. Grillo has big plans for the public limited company: it is to become the core of his diverse industrial activities and rise to number one. The basic capital is accordingly lavishly endowed: 4.5 million thalers. For the 25-year-old Kirdorf, who became head of the Management Board just two years later, the meeting with his enterprising employers marked the beginning of a long career: For over 50 years, he would lead Gelsenkirchener Bergwerks-AG, making it the most important company in the industry - and his professional star would shine with the Group's successes. Above all, however, Kirdorf was one of the first salaried managers in the German Reich to be able to stand and negotiate on an equal footing with the owners of the companies and no longer function merely as a subordinate. Albeit with difficulty, as Kirdorf recalls: "It took me years of struggle to gain the position in mining that I had to claim as a board member of the largest mining company."⁴The up-and-comer recognizes early on which path to take.

He knew that the friendly advice of a powerful person carries more weight than that of a weak person, no matter how clever and well-meaning," writes a friend, "his growing successes and the ever-increasing power of Gelsenkirchen were the main trailblazers on the way to his goal."⁵

His achievements over the following decades are undisputed. Despite crises and falling coal prices, Kirdorf's company continues to thrive. He modernizes the technology and buys more mines. The manager was convinced early on that the larger a company is, the better the distribution of costs and the higher the profit. In order to have his own means of transportation, he acquires a majority stake in the shipping and coal trading company Raab, Karcher & Co. and participates in the founding of Rheinisch- Westfälisches-Elektrizitätswerk, today's RWE, in order to market the surplus electricity from the company's own underutilized power plants. Kirdorf even gives up the monoculture of coal after competitors celebrate better success with a coal-steel combination. His family ties come to his aid: Emil takes over the Aachener Hüttenverein, which is run by his brother Adolph and welcomes the merger.

But in the nineties of the 19th century, he was drawn into the political arena - or rather, he was drawn into it. The first reason was Kirdorf's heartfelt desire to bring the competing metallurgical companies under one roof in order to put an end to the fierce price wars and eliminate competition, following the example of the American trusts - a path that business leaders in modern times also prefer to take if they do not put the brakes on the cartel authorities. In February 1893, the Rheinisch-Westfälische Kohle-Syndikat was launched, with Kirdorf acting as Chairman of the Supervisory Board and the Advisory Board. This attack on the free market mechanisms of capitalism immediately provokes furious protests from the trade unions, university professors, politicians and the press. The critics rightly complain that the syndicate is intended to push through higher prices at the expense of consumers. The head of the Gelsenkirchen-based company came under pressure: "The coal syndicate, which arose from purely economic considerations, soon became the focal point of domestic political disputes," says Albert Vogler, who later became Chairman of the Group Supervisory Board, looking back: "It is no exaggeration to say that the government and parliament, from the far right to the left, were opponents of the syndicate."⁶Kirdorf justifies himself:

"Isn't the dark side of syndicates always made into a spectre? Aren't they often just buzzwords? A certain monopoly position is necessary, otherwise the syndicate does not fulfill its purpose,

to regulate the price."⁷Nevertheless, the CEO managed to maintain the coal cartel until 1925.

Another trigger for Kirdorf's political commitment was the workers' strikes of 1905. The CEO believed in the philosophy that the best thing for employees was a flourishing company, with the boss acting as a kind of patriarch for his employees - otherwise the wage earners should work well and not rebel. This idea was later to coincide fatally with Hitler's construct of a "company community", which the old Kirdorf applauded enthusiastically. However, the workers had no intention of adopting this anti-social attitude: Poor working conditions, frequent accidents in the mines and meagre pay bring the employees to the barricades. The workers even formulate a poem: "The gentlemen with the icy conscience, The Kirdorf, Stinnes and the Thyssen, Are masters of the Ruhr in every beer village, The Thyssen, Stinnes and the Kirdorf.

The emergency law will have to be:

Away with Kirdorf, Stinnes, Thyssen!"⁸

The strikers rightly see Kirdorf and the entrepreneurs August Thyssen and Hugo Stinnes as the most powerful industrial magnates. The coal baron, however, fired back more furiously than his business friends against the workers and their allies. He rages about "the agitation of the Social Democratic and Christian-Socialist associations" and categorically rejects negotiations with the trade unions: "We would rather be harmed than enter into a rotten peace that would lead to new strikes again and again" - even though Kirdorf knows that he is alone in his fanatical fight: "We have all the political parties against us."⁹For the manager, who remains completely trapped in the feudal principles of the 19th century, advocating social improvements or labor legislation is a devil's work that "will destroy our flourishing economic life and lead our fatherland to the overthrow and decay of ultramontane tyranny"⁽¹⁰⁾.

The Gelsenkirchen boss suspected the trade unions of actually playing into the hands of Marxism with the plan to bring about a "revolution and a socialist society". The church-sponsored workers were even worse: "The Christian organization was fighting under the cloak of Christian love and unity and was heading for worse things."¹¹So it seemed only logical to Kirdorf to turn away from Christianity altogether in 1913. After the First World War, he sympathized with Teutonic cults. He wrote to a friend about the reason for leaving the church: "The decisive factor was and is the disgusting, corrosive and ultimately destructive influence that

the Christian Catholic Church, which calls itself the only one that makes us happy, exerts on our Germanity and which the Protestant confessions, after my examination, were not able to offer an effective counterweight."¹²

But Kirdorf does not spare the politicians with his tirades either. His words become increasingly sharp over the years, often drenched in anger. His easily agitated nature, his tendency towards irascibility and his notorious dogmatism make him an unpleasant opponent. He collects quotes about hatred for his family, just like other people collect stamps. The trigger for his contempt for the political caste is his disappointment at the dismissal of Prince Otto von Bismarck by Emperor Wilhelm II in 1890, which makes Kirdorf despair of his world view. His resentment was reinforced by a visit to the former Chancellor's home "Friedrichs ruh" near Hamburg in March 1891. Kirdorf came to dinner with meat broth, cod, black salsify and mutton ribs, and the Prince chatted about politics, the Emperor, dogs and Rhine wine. "Captivated and captivated by the great man's appearance and repeatedly struck by the beam of his eye," enthuses Kirdorf about the retired politician, just as teenagers today adore their pop idol. As a parting shot, Bismarck says to the mining manager: "We've had a word, but I can't help you."¹³For Kirdorf, it remains an incisive experience. He placed a bust of Bismarck in the garden of his home, at the side of which he later placed a bust of Adolf Hitler. When he received an old slouch hat of the deceased prince as a gift on the occasion of an anniversary in 1921, he presented the donated piece in his home like a relic of a saint.

From Kirdorf's political point of view, things have only gone downhill since Bismarck's retreat; the German Reich seems lost forever. This view allowed a further character trait to mature in the businessman: "I grew up as a pessimist and today I am convinced that I will die as such."¹⁴After the lost world war, he said resignedly: "I no longer believe in the recovery and reconstruction of the Reich."¹⁵Even when he looked up to Hitler with admiration, he said grumpily to the brown dictator that he should not expect him to believe in the success of the struggle.¹⁶

Until Kirdorf was to find his leading figure in the Nazi leader, he was to lash out at public figures: First and foremost, he criticized the emperor who had dismissed Bismarck. Kirdorf refuses to appear at events where Wilhelm II is present, rejects the awarding of a title of nobility and writes about the regent: "The German people must bear the punishment for having endured the rule of an incompetent, unworthy monarch for years.

and accepted the betrayal of the creator of a German empire unrepentantly."¹⁷ Friends try to muffle the outbursts of the choleric Kirdorf - probably only his prominent name protects him from prosecution. But that was not all: during the First World War, he insulted Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg as "un-German" and "cowardly" and denied him the "will to win". At the same time, Kirdorf called for more violent attacks against England, demanding the conquest of further territories abroad and the acquisition of further overseas colonies. Instead of Bethmann, Field Marshal Hindenburg should be appointed Chancellor. Kirdorf's nationalism and uncompromising attitude even increased after the war, and he supported the ultra-right All-German Association as a member.

Kirdorf's increasing political activity was accompanied by his withdrawal from his profession. As early as 1905, he gave up some of his countless offices, for example as second chairman of the Mining Association, as a member of the Bochum Chamber of Commerce and the Provincial Committee. However, he did not resign from his position as chairman of the board of Gelsenkirchener Bergwerks-AG until 1926. His company is absorbed into the newly founded Vereinigte Stahlwerke, as are the Thyssen companies and the Rheinische Stahlwerke. This marks the birth of a new coal and steel giant, the most powerful merged group in Europe, now headed by Albert Vogler. Kirdorf is 79 years old when he retires - he has been at the helm of his mining company for almost 54 years. This shows how much the owners themselves valued the elderly manager - or, as a Berlin financial magazine put it: "He dominates the capitalists and is not subservient to them."¹⁸ Until his death, he still held posts and honorary positions. And more importantly, his personal connections were effective even without a formal function.

This was evident when, in 1917, he discreetly initiated the financial support of the Fatherland Party, a new organization founded by the ultra-right activists Alfred von Tirpitz and Wolfgang Kapp, the later putschist. The Kohlesyndikat, whose business committee Kirdorf headed as chairman, served as a source of funds. The surviving minutes of the meeting provide a revealing insight into the methods of industrial covert party financing at the time:

"If I alone had to decide, I would say that we from our association give the Fatherland Party a hefty helping hand with funds. But that can only happen if there is no objection.

Kleymanns: I am absolutely in favor of that. (Shout: There will be no objection!)

Schäfer: I move that it be presented at the next colliery owners' meeting. (Objection.)

Chairman: It's not practical to do it in such a large meeting because otherwise the movement will be damaged; then it will be said that the heavy industry gave the money for it. You can only do that by deciding it in smaller circles. (Shout-out: Supervisory Board!)

Stinnes: Don't you want to find out whether a unanimous decision by the Supervisory Board is necessary? If it is not unanimous, it is out of the question.

Chairman: Would the gentlemen of the Supervisory Board who are here all agree to this?

Thyssen: He has no objections.

Chairman: Then we can do it. Stinnes: But then it must be done thoroughly. Chairman: First 100,000 marks.

Stinnes: One million. Give the people a million marks, then it will help. Chairman: He must have a lot of money for the near future to spread his stuff far and wide.

Stinnes: What use is it if we stand on the point of view. It can only be done by setting the great masses in motion.

Jacob: We mustn't discuss it publicly because of the wage movements, otherwise we'll get all the miners on our necks.

Chairman: Nobody is allowed to talk about it.

Chairman: I am pleased that this has been decided."¹⁹

A rare document from the inner workings of the association. It is difficult to understand how such discussions took place when Hitler was later supported.

Time also changed Kirdorf's private life. Worn down by the battles with trade unionists and government officials, lonely after the loss of colleagues, he spends most of his free time in his retreat in the Mülheim woods, which he appropriately christens "Streithof". The domicile in the style of a rural estate with an inner courtyard, main house and farm buildings is surrounded by the Broich-Speldorf forest, with Fritz Thyssen and Hugo Stinnes living next door as prominent neighbors. Here, Kirdorf can pursue his passion for horse riding. He even hires a groom for his half-breed Pasha and his thoroughbred Halbgott. Otherwise, he organizes his picture collection with works by Lenbach (Bismarck portrait), Corinth, Menzel, Achenbach, Leistikow and Böcklin. His wife Mathilde suffers a stroke during the war, from which she dies in December 1919. His father took care of his daughters Jenny, Lilly and Marie; he found jobs for his sons-in-law in his company. For his wife, the se-

nior quickly found a replacement: in February 1923, the 74-year-old patriarch married Olga Wes- sel, née Gayen, "my friend of many years who was staying with me as a house guest". In the same year, Kirdorf traveled to Bavaria with Olga during the summer months - they spent a kind of honeymoon there. The couple stopped off in Munich and visited Kirdorf's brother Adolph. One last fateful meeting: Adolph suddenly falls ill and dies in the presence of his relatives. In the Bavarian capital, he attends an NSDAP event at which Hitler is announced as a speaker. But the party leader does not appear himself; disappointed, the nationalist Kirdorf makes his way to the spa town of Reichenhall. Three years later, however, he has the opportunity to meet the Nazi leader. Hitler is now a celebrity beyond the borders of Bavaria and his failed putsch makes headlines across the country. The demagogic Austrian seeks contact with industrial circles in 1926. The reason for this was not the few votes of this group, but rather their hidden influence. And most importantly, the capitalists had plenty of financial resources at their disposal. Even a single donation, which for business leaders is just pocket money, can quickly help the ailing Nazi party back on its feet after the temporary NSDAP ban has dried up the sources.

In the fall, Hitler appears before business leaders in several private circles and explains his goals. Kirdorf hears the propagandist for the first time at one of these meetings in Essen and soon attends another event. The old man listened with rapt attention to Hitler's phrases, "his speech made such a powerful impression on me that I shook his hand after the end of the lecture," recalls the retired manager. "He found out my name later, friends of his approached me, which brought me into personal contact with him and to an hour-long discussion in Munich."²⁰ The visit to Munich was arranged by Elsa Bruckmann, the wife of the art and book publisher Hugo Bruckmann. Elsa, a Romanian-born Princess Cantacuzène, accepted Hitler early on and regularly invited him to evening salons at her villa on Karolinenplatz, where Friedrich Nietzsche and Rainer Maria Rilke used to hang out. Elsa Bruckmann adored the seemingly left-wing party leader, she taught him manners for dealing with better society, paid his rent from time to time, left him furniture and a watch and bought him a trench coat. Like Helene Bechstein, her rival for the Nazi man's favor, she gives Hitler a dog whip, for her a symbol of masculinity and power. She has her initials engraved on the silver pommel. For the Bruckmanns' guests, the young NSDAP leader with his dandy hat, his whip, his openly carried pistol

and with his hoarse, often overlapping voice like an exotic - and is an amusement for the evening.

But Elsa Bruckmann is not interested in superficial amusement. She carried on the Nazi's mission and made it her mission to help him to the top. On the recommendation of their mutual acquaintance Karl zu Löwenstein, she sent Emil Kirdorf a letter to his vacation destination Bad Gastein: "As an enthusiastic supporter of the Führer, she had made it her life's work to bring him into contact with the leading men in heavy industry in order to prepare the ground for National Socialism in these circles as well"²¹, the senior later reported. The meeting took place at the Bruckmanns' home on July 4, 1927. In August, Kirdorf enthusiastically recorded Hitler's words during the conversation: "First of all, his fight is against the corrosive influence of the trade unions and, first and foremost, the Social Democratic, patriotic trade unions. My objection that the Christian-social trade unions, supported by the Center, were in my opinion the most dangerous because they were fighting under a false flag, he refuted with regard to his task with the correct remark that he could not fight against two fronts. Without a doubt, I have to agree with him on this - the first task today is to fight the destructive Marxist doctrine, to convince the workers of their error and to lead them back to love of their country."²²These statements show how skillfully Hitler took up Kirdorf's concerns and issues and appealed to him with promises. The conversation, which lasted several hours, had an effect on the old mining rascal: "Searching for every ray of hope for Germany's salvation, I would like to have found in Adolf Hitler the man who can accomplish the work of German national sentiment and salvation. He feels that he has the vocation to do so, which means he has a powerful weapon in his hand. I have arranged to bring him together with a number of leading figures from this side of industry over the next month. If I succeed in winning him supporters in these circles, my hope of saving the fatherland will be strengthened."²³Kirdorf first does the obvious thing: In August 1927, he became an NSDAP party member with the membership number 71 032, making him the first representative of big business to not only sympathize with the Nazis but also formally belong to the movement. However, this step increasingly alienated him from his friends.

But he also opened his private coffers. On one occasion, he stood in for his supreme party leader at the last minute, as Hitler theatrically described: "I had signed a bill of exchange for 40,000 marks for the party. The money I was expecting was not forthcoming, the party coffers were empty and the due date was approaching with no hope of raising the money.

the money. I was already considering shooting myself because I had no other way out. Four days before the due date, I told Privy Councillor Bruckmann about my predicament, who immediately took matters into her own hands, called Privy Councillor Kirdorf and arranged for me to go to him. I told Kirdorf about my plans and immediately won him over. He provided me with the money and so I was able to cash the bill in good time."²⁴With his financial injection, Kirdorf alleviated the party's acute financial difficulties; he donated a total of 100,000 marks privately.⁽²⁵⁾ Much more important to Hitler than the personal financial benefits were the services of the coal magnate as a door opener to the top echelons of the German business elite. Kirdorf asks the NSDAP leader to write down his thoughts on ecology and entrepreneurship. The former chairman of the executive board wanted to have the essay printed and discreetly distribute it among his friends and acquaintances. This is a unique opportunity for the party dictator: he could never reach the country's most important entrepreneurs through his speeches or private conversations alone; many simply do not attend such events and, moreover, show no interest in getting to know the aspiring National Socialist better - the top 100 generally only socialize with their peers and, under normal circumstances, would consider it lowbrow to talk to an Austrian corporal. The situation is completely different when a famous manager acts as a kind of Trojan horse for the radical right-wing messages and personally makes a good impression on the author. Hitler therefore quickly set to work and delivered several pages of his philosophy in August 1927. He wrote in his accompanying letter:

"Dear Privy Councillor!

It is with sincere pleasure that I comply with your request and present you with the following transcript of my thoughts on the current situation in Germany and the hopes I have, despite everything, for a resurgence of our people. The joyful approval of thousands of my listeners teaches me again and again that where our race and species have remained pure, the sense of the great German heritage, which is entrusted to us and which obliges us all, has also remained alive. With this sense also lives on the will to work for the inner and outer resurgence of our people. To the best of my ability, I will try to pave the way for this will in the darkness of these days, and I will be happy if you, dear Privy Councillor, want to help spread these thoughts in your circles. For I believe in their victory.

With German greetings, your devoted Adolf Hitler"²⁶

The 80-year-old is enthusiastic about the pamphlet. He has the text published as a brochure



Hitler and the industrialist Kirdorf

printed by Hugo Bruckmann in Munich with the title "Adolf Hitler: Der Weg zum Wiederaufstieg - überreicht von Emil Kirdorf". He sent the booklet to his business colleagues and friends and gave it to them personally - all in the greatest secrecy. The essay therefore remained undiscovered by the public for a long time, with a surviving copy only reappearing in the spring of 1966. The reticence makes sense: the theses that Hitler expounded in it differed greatly from his attacks on the economy in "Mein Kampf" and the party's 25-point programme of February 1920, which called for the "breaking of interest bondage" and partial nationalization. If the changes to his written views were made public, the party leader would face a fierce confrontation with the left wing of the NSDAP.

confrontation with the left wing of the NSDAP around Otto Strasser, who welcomed nationalization.

In addition, the manuscript is, historically speaking, a rare document of Hitler's written keynote speech, the second such publication after "Mein Kampf" - even if ordinary mortals never got to see the brochure. The remarks show the arguments the rabble-rouser used to win over the educated business class. In order to please the entrepreneurs, Hitler was chalking things up. He struck moderate notes and tried to analyze economic problems like a statesman. The subject of Jews is only mentioned once - and then only in the form of the "international Jew" and in connection with Marxism. This reticence is also aimed at Hitler's particular readership, who usually have little sympathy for inflammatory anti-Semitism. There is also no mention of expropriation and similar horror words for entrepreneurs.

In his essay, Hitler denied that the situation was stable despite the flourishing economy at the time - a "deliberate lie".²⁷ The economy was gradually losing its independence, unemployment was increasing: "An army of people, two to three times the size of our old peacetime army, which, through years of weaning itself from all work, one day finds weaning a habit, but nonetheless claims the right to live within the nation at the expense of the whole" - a criticism that can still be heard today. The German economy was dependent on exports in order to be able to pay for the necessary imports. This is followed by a criticism of globalization: "The final decision in economic battles in this world has never been based on the greater or lesser prowess of the individual competitor, but rather on the strength of the sword they had to throw into the balance for their business and thus for their lives." For Hitler, the real cause of the misery lay deeper, because "the German people are increasingly falling apart into two camps that are deadly hostile to each other", namely Marxism on the one hand and the national community on the other. The people

"needs the necessary space in this world to develop its own ego", the author propagates, which is why it is the task of politics to "give this natural imperialism the equally natural satisfaction". This nonsense philosophy would later lead directly to the Second World War; the invasion of the eastern neighbors was intended to create this so-called living space. The Nazi leader denounces the alleged reasons for the decline: "Instead of national and racial values, millions of our people today pay homage to the idea of internationality. Instead of the strength and genius of the personality, according to the nature of an absurd democracy, the

majority of numbers, in other words weakness and stupidity. And instead of recognizing and affirming the necessity of struggle, we preach the theology of pacifism, reconciliation of nations and eternal world peace."

Hitler denies the economy a prominent position in changing social conditions, saying that the economy alone does not guarantee Germany's future. The Nazi movement "sees in it only a necessary die-ner in the life of a national body and nationality. It perceives an independent national economy as a necessity, but it does not see it as the primary thing, but rather the opposite: the strong nationalist state alone can give such an economy protection and the freedom to exist and develop." All in all, the Nazi leader remains unclear and vague when it comes to economic issues, he mostly sticks to the field of politics, his line of argument follows the familiar keywords Marxism, race and people, blood and soil - only the words are wrapped in absorbent cotton and are less caustic than in his public appearances.

Kirdorf believes he has found a new Bismarck. He promotes the brown up-and-comer, who could be his son or even his grandson, to the best of his ability. The senior citizen does not stop at private discussions with acquaintances or sharing his printed work. Rather, the retired mining boss used his nimbus and gave Hitler several opportunities to explain his radical theses to a select group of entrepreneurs at his home in the "Streithof", and therefore organized "several meetings with leading figures in the industrial districts"²⁸, according to Kirdorf. On October 26, 1927, 14 German business leaders arrived at his spacious "Streithof" estate.

Adolf Hitler, for whom the luxurious surroundings of the mining manager are unwelcome, now finds the exclusive audience he is looking for for his advertising tour.

"The success of Hitler's almost three-hour presentation seemed to meet my expectations in full," Kirdorf later patted himself on the back, "because there is no doubt that all the participants were deeply moved by his gripping explanations."²⁹The NSDAP leader was able to get his message across unfiltered and directly to the man and put himself in the right light. Hitler's agitation seemed to work under Kirdorf's patronage: Wilhelm Tengeimann, for example, manager at Essener Steinkohlenberg- werke AG, explained after the war that Kirdorf's influence and meetings with Hitler in the "Streithof" had played an important role in his decision to join the NSDAP.³⁰

But not all industrialists were enthusiastic about the Nazi dictator's appearances in Kirdorf's house. Ernst Poensgen, for example, director of Vereinigte Stahlwerke, summarized his impressions as follows: "The man completely impressed me.

The euphoria of the old mining magnate offends some of his long-time companions - they distance themselves. The Jewish banker Arthur Salomonsohn, director of the Berlin discount company and former member of the supervisory board of Gelsenkirchener Bergwerks-AG, wrote in a letter dated December 31, 1927 to the new NSDAP member Kirdorf "how deeply and painfully these events have affected me". The finance manager cannot believe that the senior suddenly cheers Hitler's inhuman anti-Semitic demands. "How is it possible that a man like you, who counts Jews among his admirers and friends and who knows how many thousands of Jews courageously and self-sacrificingly went to war and gave their lives for their fatherland, can approve of and propagate this declaration of the lawlessness of all Jews without distinction?"³² The old man could not accept this. Three days later, he replied to his friend Salomonsohn. Although Kirdorf admitted that his commitment was "not without conflicts of conscience", it was only through Hitler's harsh incitement of Jews that "the broad masses could be won over to a national movement". For Kirdorf is a stranger to anti-Semitism. He hates Marxists and Social Democrats, the churches, the trade unions with their "destructive influence of continuous wage increases and shortening of working hours" - but he does not hate Jews. As harshly as he verbally attacks his opponents and thus isolates himself more and more, he does not utter any anti-Semitic tirades.

Nevertheless, Kirdorf will be aware that his support for Hitler indirectly makes his anti-Semitism more acceptable. The good mood of the headstrong old man soon evaporated when Nazi functionaries began to front against the right-wing Stahlhelm Verband and a nasty article appeared in the newspaper "Die neue Front" against the Rheinisch-Westfälische Kohlesyndikat, the association that Kirdorf credited with his greatest success in life. The 90-year-old was disappointed by the movement - and deeply offended. In August 1928, he angrily declares his resignation from the party in a letter to the NSDAP, "despite all his sympathy and friendship for Mr. Adolf Hitler". He now turns to his long-time friend Alfred Hugenberg and his German National People's Party. Despite his apparent distance from the NSDAP, Kirdorf by no means gave up his close relationship with Hitler in the years that followed.

On the contrary, despite his open sympathy for Hugenberg, the former mining baron supported the NSDAP leader for the next few years. Kirdorf continued to make his house available to Hitler for confidential meetings with business leaders. This culminated in the senator's published demand that Hugenberg and Hitler should jointly form a "national bloc" to unite the fragmented right-wing parties and form the future government. Kirdorf could count on Hugenberg's support in this endeavor.

count on Hugenberg's support. After all, he is indebted to the old string-puller from the past: Kirdorf helped to discreetly finance Hugenberg's empire.

The head of Gelsenkirchener Bergwerks-AG knew Hugenberg from his time as a member of the Bergbauverein, the Ruhrzechenverband, the Centralverband Deutscher Industrieller and as Chairman of the Board of Directors of Stahlkonzern Fried. Krupp AG. From 1909 to 1918, Hugenberg managed the company until a better business opportunity made him switch: He buys up rows and rows of provincial newspapers, acquires news agencies, Universum Film AG (Ufa) and book and magazine publishers. In doing so, he created the largest press empire in Germany to date, the most powerful instrument for controlling public opinion. And Hugenberg used his influence extensively in favor of right-wing radical and nationalist movements - incidentally making himself a lavish fortune in the process. Hugenberg also showed his colors in politics. From 1919, he sat in the Reichstag as a member of parliament for the German National People's Party; in October 1928, he became party chairman and remained so until Hitler came to power in 1933. However, it was thanks to gray eminences such as Kirdorf that the employed manager Hugenberg was financially able to go on a large-scale shopping spree in the press world.

As early as 1913, Kirdorf, Hugenberg and Stinnes formed a "committee of three" to tap into the election campaign fund of the Central Association of German Industrialists to support politically favorable candidates. Other industrialists soon joined in. The business tycoons also complained that their views and demands were hardly being heard in the German press. What to do? The answer is obvious: support newspapers that report in a business-friendly way - or buy their own newspaper. The first takeover target is "Die Post" in Berlin in 1913/1914. Hugenberg was to manage the funds on a fiduciary basis, with the backing of Kirdorf and Stinnes. During the First World War, the Krupp manager used the Group's funds to acquire shareholdings in press companies, the foundation of the later Hugenberg Group. Hugenberg was a master at diverting some of the other people's money for himself and concluding the best deals for his own benefit and on his own account without these covert operations becoming known - even if Kirdorf and Stinnes were at least vaguely aware of them.³³ Other secret sources of money were also available: Kirdorf, Stinnes and Hugenberg founded the Economic Association for the Promotion of Intellectual Reconstruction Forces in 1919, which was made up of a total of "twelve national men" from industry. The group discusses the so-called "national special-purpose assets", which essentially come from the Mining Association and which Hugenberg uses for diffuse "national" purposes.

purposes". Hugenberg also managed the finances of Mutuum Darlehens-AG and Alterum Kredit-AG, which were founded during the period of inflation. They are intended to help ailing newspapers that are close to the German People's Party and the right-wing spectrum. However, Henry Bernhard, Stresemann's secretary, complained in 1926 that Hugenberg had usurped the party press himself when he was appointed trustee instead of taking care of the newspapers' health.³⁴ Hugenberg, as head of the German National People's Party a rival of the NSDAP in the struggle for power in the Reichstag, swung to a pro-Nazi course with the approval and urging of his friend Kirdorf: On the occasion of the referendum against the Young Plan in 1929, Hugenberg supported Hitler's party. The latter also railed against the intention of an expert commission chaired by the banker Owen D. Young to reorganize the reparation payments for the lost First World War. As a result, the Hugenberg newspapers trumpeted their support for Hitler and his NSDAP. Even if the referendum fails, the free propaganda in many German newspapers is an invaluable help for the Nazi leader in making his party better known throughout the country. Hitler reaps the rewards in the Reichstag elections in September 1930, which are marked by the global economic crisis: The NSDAP wins 6.4 million votes and 107 seats and becomes the second strongest parliamentary group behind the Social Democrats - the first electoral breakthrough. Two years earlier, Hitler had only managed to secure 810,000 votes and twelve parliamentary seats. This brought the radical Nazi party to the attention of larger business circles, who suddenly found themselves confronted with a new political force to be taken seriously. As a result, far more companies open their coffers to Hitler than before. However, Hugenberg's support was not limited to his journalistic presence. At a meeting in Berlin, the media zampano also promised the NSDAP leader a portion of the funds that Hugenberg had collected from industry and spent in trust for political purposes.⁽³⁵⁾ The industrialist Fritz Thyssen estimated that Hugenberg had passed on around a fifth of the funds he controlled to Hitler in the years before 1933; the annual amount for the NSDAP amounted to two million marks.³⁶ This sum only included part of the total donations. The brown dictator later thanked Hugenberg for his support with the post of Reich Minister of Economics and Food in the first cabinet in 1933. Even though Hugenberg had to resign just a few months later and cede his press empire to the Nazis during the Third Reich, he still collected significant packages of compensation from stock corporations. He remained unmolested until his death in 1951 and was able to keep his fortune. The joint Hugenberg-Hitler front against the Young Plan accompanied Kirdorf throughout his life.

personally with numerous campaigns. In conversations and letters, the retiree tried to mobilize acquaintances. For example, he wrote: "A rumor came to my ears and compels me, as your oldest and perhaps best friend, as an old man whose political judgement, because it stems from deep national feeling, has never gone wrong, to shout a word of warning to you: Anyone who rejects the current referendum has, in my opinion, forfeited the right to call himself a 'German'."³⁷ Another letter shows how stubbornly Kirdorf reacted: "I no longer have any inner relationship with anyone who has denied their Germanness. After that, my inner relationship with all family members and former friends is regulated, even if the external relationship seems to be maintained out of due consideration." And similarly to a business partner: "Then, unfortunately, the relationships that have bound me to your house and to you for as long as I can remember will also be settled. You must understand that any further discussion of the national question can only lead to further estrangement, so this must be limited to when and where my resignation from your Supervisory Board should take place." Such tirades finally drove the old man into isolation. When the referendum failed, Kirdorf fell back into his pessimism, seeing betrayal and the "enslavement" of the nation; he had one consolation: "The only ray of hope is the courageous and unwavering work in the patriotic service of my friends Hugenberg and Hitler."

In fact, despite his support for the German National People's Party, Kirdorf maintained his relationship with the Nazi leader. They met regularly, Hitler sent him New Year's greetings several times, and the mining king wrote back: "My wife and I return your kind wishes for the New Year with heartfelt thanks." And although Kirdorf is no longer a member of the NSDAP, he is flattered to accept Hitler's invitation to attend the party congress in Nuremberg in August 1929 as a guest of honor. Winifred Wagner, the composer's daughter-in-law, appeared next to Kirdorf in the stands. The organized march of the brown hordes becomes an impressive spectacle: 40,000 participants flock to Nuremberg; 25,000 SS and SA men and 1,300 members of the Hitler Youth arrive in 35 special trains. The NSDAP demonstrates its power and underlines its claim to be the leading mass party of the right-wing spectrum. Immediately after his return, Kirdorf writes an exuberant letter of thanks in which he praises "the bright light of the days experienced" and the "uplifting impressions" of the event: "We will never forget how overwhelmed we were when we attended the memorial service for the dead of the World War and the dedication of the standards in Luitpoldhain and the march past of your troops on the main market square, by the sight of the thousands and thousands of your supporters, who had enthusiasm pouring from their eyes".

who hung on your every word and cheered you on."³⁸ The mining manager's earlier skepticism about the NSDAP was blown away: "Anyone who, in this time of brutal rule without a fatherland, was able to gather together such a crowd of nationally-minded people who were willing to make any sacrifice and bind them to themselves can have this confidence. You can be proud of the honors and tributes paid to you, the likes of which have hardly been accorded to a crowned ruler. My wife and I are happy that we were able to witness them." On Hitler's instructions, Rudolf Hess sent some photos of the party congress to Kirdorf; when he immediately ordered further enlargements, his wish was fulfilled without delay. For the Nazi leader, the public appearance of the mining legend was a valuable propaganda gift, as it demonstrated to the astonished audience which respectable personalities were paying their respects to the Nazis and how respectable the party had become in business circles. Hitler exploited Kirdorf's appearance accordingly and, with Senior's approval, had his letter of thanks printed in the "Völkischer Beobachter". In fact, Senior continued to be involved in the background. For example, when Otto Fürst zu Salm-Horstmar, a confidant of Heinrich Class, the leader of the radical Alldeutscher Verband, was desperately looking for someone to deliver a confidential message to the NSDAP leader in October 1931, the name of the former Gelsenkirchen board chairman automatically came up: "Who has influence on Hitler? Would perhaps old Kirdorf, who loves Hitler very much and has often had him as a guest, be the man who could invite him and bring him to his senses?"³⁹ Kirdorf fulfills the wish and meets with the NS leader, but Hitler does not want to be talked into his policies by the All-Germans. And in the decisive month of January 1933, when the course was set for Hitler's chancellorship, Kirdorf was one of the few business leaders to be informed in advance of the results of the confidential talks with the former Reich Chancellor Franz von Papen. This shows how naturally business leaders saw Kirdorf as a supporter of Hitler and how strongly the retiree was still pulling the strings behind the scenes - even though he had long since retired from most offices.

He and other Nazi sympathizers continue to use the Mining Association as a lever, one of the central nerve nodes in the Ruhr industry's sphere of power. The interest group has ample funds at its disposal to influence politicians and parties. August Heinrichsbauer, editor-in-chief of the Rheinisch-Westfälischer Wirtschaftsdienst, public relations worker for his clients and ally to the Nazis, was financed by the mining and steel industry and openly advocated a Hitler-style dictatorship: "I am

firmly convinced that the entire system of anonymous, democratic parliamentarism will be replaced in the course of time by a new system that is geared towards leader responsibility and allegiance and that will have considerable echoes of Italian fascism, without of course having to copy it down to the last detail."⁴⁰ Heinrichs-Bauer, who was very familiar with the internal workings of the industrial associations, later named the exact amounts that were transferred to individual National Socialists following the NSDAP's success in the 1930 elections. "In making these payments, the mining industry proceeded from the consideration that it was essential to establish and remain in close contact with the party, which was best guaranteed by ongoing subsidies."⁴¹ The money distributors identified the NSDAP Reich Organization leader Gregor Strasser, a man with "a clear view of sober realities", as a target. From the spring of 1931, Strasser received a "regular monthly allowance of 10,000 Reichsmarks" from the mining fund.⁴² Walther Funk, one of Hitler's economic policy advisors and former editor-in-chief of the "Berliner Börsenzeitung", received 1,000 marks a month for his publication "Wirtschaftspolitischer Dienst". "The mining money paid to the NSDAP in the years 1930 to early 1933, including the amounts paid to Strasser and Funk, barely exceeded a total of 500,000 to 600,000 Reichsmarks," Heinrichsbauer summarizes, "in addition to the sums mentioned here, one or two contributions for more local or regional purposes were probably also made by individual factories or individuals in heavy industry"⁴³- for which another 50,000 to 60,000 Reichsmarks should be added. A considerable chunk of money for a party in financial difficulties, and that in the decisive years before the seizure of power. Kirdorf also managed to get a confidant a job with the National Socialists. He was able to place the unemployed Josef Terboven, a former bank employee, with NSDAP functionary Otto Strasser. Strasser remembers: "He was a pretty hard-working party member who always seemed to have a lot of money with him. As most of our members were poor, his frequent small gifts to them were not without effect - and at the first election he became district leader for Essen. In this new position as one of the leaders of the Nazi Party, Terboven did much to bring Hitler and industrialists together."⁴⁴ The enterprising Gauleiter was very much to Kirdorf's taste. The senior citizen sent him money through his son-in-law Herbert Kauert, who worked in the associations as a board member of the Gelsenkirchener Bergwerks-AG. Ernst Brandi, chairman of the mining association, later refers to this in a letter to Kauert, asking him for help.

"Mr. Terboven must have known that in all the difficult last years for him, the Mining Association and its chairman had supported him unwaveringly; this went through your hands, especially at the beginning, and you could explain to him that you had always found understanding and help from me with your wishes for Mr. Terboven years ago."⁴⁵ The unabashed payments from mining comrades Kirdorf & Co. did not fail to have an effect: the industry-friendly Terboven made a career for himself in the Third Reich, Hitler appointed him Reich Commissioner for Norway. But Kirdorf was not to live to see the rise of his protégé.

On the other hand, the old man quickly abandons his reservations towards the NSDAP after taking power in 1933. The dictator, who ruled with an iron hand, met with his full approval. At the beginning of 1934, he asked to be readmitted to the party. Rudolf Hess has the new party card issued on April 1, 1934. The 87-year-old is horrified when he holds the paper in his hands: He was now assigned the high membership number 1999172. Kirdorf now considers this number to be a flaw, he wants his old number 71032 back, which identifies him as an early party member. He turned to Hitler; in June 1934, Hess ordered the NSDAP leader to allow Kirdorf to keep his original number and that his membership would be uninterrupted. The party books were even altered for this purpose. Hitler used the process for publicity, praised Kirdorf as an "old fighter" and awarded him the golden badge of honor. From then on, the dictator was able to use the old mining magnate as a propaganda tool. The once controversial Kirdorf willingly submitted to the wishes of the Nazi leader, but paid a high price for his devotion: friends and acquaintances turned their backs on him and he was alone and lonely in the last years of his life.

After Kirdorf's death, his "Streithof" stands empty for some time, the estate is looted after the war and serves as officers' quarters. In 1951, the Red Cross set up a home for the elderly, and from 1973 to 1999 it became a specialist clinic for addicts. The Rheinelbe colliery is no longer in operation and is converted into a park after the Second World War. Coal mining, Kirdorf's life's work, experienced its final heyday in the Federal Republic of Germany in the 1950s: in 1957, hard coal production peaked at 150 million tons, with coal covering 95 percent of Germany's energy consumption. Competition from gas, oil and cheap foreign products led to a gradual decline. The German Ruhr companies merge their mining activities into Deutsche Steinkohle AG, now part of RAG. Currently, 99 percent of German coal production is concentrated under this umbrella - a flawless monopoly, just as Emil Kirdorf and his coal syndicate always wanted 100 years ago.



FRITZ THYSSEN

The big entrepreneur

The luck seems perfect. In a ceremonial act in Berlin, the newly appointed Reich Minister and Prussian Interior Minister Hermann Göring appoints his friend Fritz Thyssen as Prussian State Councillor for life. Only a few months had passed since the Nazis came to power in January 1933. Hitler himself arranged the promotion. But that was not all: on the orders of the brown dictator, Thyssen enters the Reichstag as an NSDAP deputy for Düsseldorf East, is appointed to the new General Council of the Economy and is also allowed to found an "Institute for Research into the Economic Order of the Estates" in Düsseldorf. With this, the industrialist wants to realize his romantic idea of a structured society as in the Middle Ages, where everyone should live happily within their caste, but not break out of it if possible.

Fritz Thyssen is at the pinnacle of power. His positions give him influence and prestige in Nazi circles. The tall man with the friendly smile and polished manners proudly wears his party badge. He is now both a politician and an industrialist. He describes his goals in a newspaper article: He had taken on the duty and responsibility of helping the state to reshape economic conditions. He could only fulfill this responsibility if the calm development of the new legal order was not disturbed from any side, for example by "liberalist remnants"¹ or unrest on the wage front. A manager of one of the four Thyssen

unterstellten Gaue schreibt Mitte Juli 1933 Ergebniseitsbriefe an den Industriellen: «Sie sind für unser Gauwirtschaftsgebiet wirtschaftspolitisch die oberste staatliche Autorität geworden. Accordingly, I have instructed all my departments to turn exclusively to you in all matters of economic policy, with the exception of agricultural policy issues, and to regard your decision as binding."²For Hitler, the official patronage was a clever move: it cost nothing, flattered Thyssen's vanity and at the same time demonstrated his gratitude for the entrepreneur's years of political and financial support: "Thyssen's services to the Nazi movement undoubtedly played a very important role in the early stages of their struggle for political power. At a time when every penny counted in the party, Thyssen gave with his hands full. He introduced Hitler to influential men in industry."³In addition, Thyssen was the perfect figurehead for the NSDAP: he was one of the best-known and richest men in the German Reich. His name was the epitome of heavy industry. Anyone who counts such personalities among his camp has earned the accolade of credibility in the business world.

Public fraternization with the Nazis was also worthwhile for the representative of the famous steel dynasty: "That Fritz Thyssen would be one of the greatest revolutionary winners of the national revolution of 1933 was already known to everyone a few weeks after Hitler's rise to power," wrote a historian at the time, "those who could not live without ideology could console themselves with the fact that, at least for the time being, the pure leader principle applied in business without any democratic apparatus and that the leader in the core area of German industry was Hitler's old financial backer Thyssen."⁴For the entrepreneur quickly ousted others from their positions: In 1933, Thyssen became chairman of the so-called Langnamverein, one of the most powerful interest groups in industry, and head of the influential Northwest Employers' Association. This further cemented his position.

It is hard to imagine a sharper contrast in Nazi Germany: on the one hand, the unscrupulous upstart Hitler, from a humble background, proletarian and successful mass seducer. On the other, the entrepreneur's son, born rich, with distinguished taste and aristocratic habitus - two opposing worlds. And yet Fritz Thyssen falls for the person of the Nazi dictator at a time when others are still turning up their noses in disgust. How can this happen?

The explanation for this phenomenon can be found in the family, or more precisely in the relationship between father and son. Fritz Thyssen spends half his life struggling with a love-hate relationship with his father. This almost classic conflict erupts

The son is characterized by constant battles. Only after his father's death in 1926 can the junior feel free - Fritz Thyssen is already 52 years old when he takes up his inheritance in the company. His father, August Thyssen, turned out to be no easy character. He is the real founder of the Thyssen company, using his elbows and talent to make a brilliant rise from medium-sized businessman to major group owner. August Thyssen's birth in 1842 was already under a bad star: he was born into a marriage between relatives - his father married a first cousin. As the family later admits, this is one of the reasons for the mental and physical defects in the following generations. In 1871, August Thyssen founds the limited partnership Thyssen & Co. in Mülheim an der Ruhr - the cradle of the empire. Finances are not a problem, August himself has 32,000 thalers at his disposal, later his sister Balbina and his brother Josef invest considerable sums in the company.

Just one year later, 30-year-old August walks Hedwig Pelzer down the aisle. A strange couple say "I do": with his short stature and strangely high-pitched falsetto voice, August is not exactly the prince charming for the 24-year-old, who comes from a long-established Protestant business family whose father owns a thriving tannery. Is money the real reason for the marriage? The fact is that Hedwig brings more dowry into the marriage than August has in assets in his company. And the young entrepreneur urgently needs fresh finances to expand. It soon becomes clear how different the mentalities and desires of the two spouses are. Four children are born in quick succession: Fritz, the eldest, August, the "little August", Heinrich and Hedwig, called Hede. The offspring cannot dampen the parents' problems: arguments break out more and more often and the two become increasingly estranged. Little Fritz Thyssen witnesses first-hand how cool and dismissive his father is - if he ever finds time for the children. By contrast, the head of the family devotes himself intensively to his business and, what is probably even worse for his own offspring to watch, cares for his siblings and other relatives. The fun-loving mother suffers from Fritz's father's coldness. But that is not the only reason for the quarrel: August Thyssen is almost proverbially stingy and allows his family little distraction, because everything costs and costs. The clan lives in the "Villa Froschteich", a house on the factory grounds where the noise and smell of production waft over every day. The entrepreneur's wife Hedwig expects a life of luxury befitting her status for herself and her children, and even dreams of being elevated to the nobility. August doesn't even think about it,

to fulfill such expensive wishes - if he listens to her at all. The frustrated woman flees. She goes to places where high society meets, where she can breathe a different air. She travels alone to exclusive seaside resorts, especially to Wiesbad. As is the way with spa stays: Hedwig meets other men - such as Georg Carl Freiherr von Rotsmann, 18 years her senior, a major in the cavalry and Grand Ducal bathing commissioner in Nauheim.

Such excursions seem harmless; August is fine with his wife going it alone. Then, unexpectedly, a lightning strike hits the facade of their marriage: at the beginning of the 1880s, Hedwig becomes pregnant and suffers a miscarriage. August is horrified and furious - the child could not be his. A scandal is on the horizon. The husband denies paternity and files for divorce. On December 2, 1885, when Fritz had just turned twelve, the Hamm Higher Regional Court dissolved the marriage.⁵ Hedwig married her lover Carl von Rotsmann almost two years later, but he died four years later. She marries twice more, a captain-commander and a general, which gives her access to the upper echelons of society. Hedwig dies in 1940 and her divorced husband August Thyssen remains single until his death in 1926.

The divorce not only throws the Thyssens' family life into turmoil, it is also the seed for years of conflict between the offspring and their father. Hedwig had brought considerable money into the marriage, which was invested in the company and made its growth possible in the first place. She therefore only agrees to the divorce in return for an annual maintenance payment of 6,000 gold marks. Even more important is a second agreement, which is sealed in a contract: August must transfer the entire estate to his children. In this way, the mother tries to protect the under-age offspring from the father, who, as a shrewd businessman, could cheat his children. Hedwig also wants to use this arrangement to prevent the other family members from influencing the management of the company. However, the situation is made really tricky by another clause: August Thyssen only agrees to hand over the company if he can determine the date himself and remains the sole owner until then. In fact, August does not even consider transferring the company to his children until his death. They, in turn, see themselves as the rightful owners of the company and demand the company shares from their father in the following years - or at least generous regular compensation payments. The children hit a snag: August Thyssen even had a legal opinion drawn up in 1907 stating that the contract between him and his divorced wife was purely a declaration of intent without any legal obligation.

To replace his mother, his father hires a caregiver, Minna Schlömann.

But Fritz and his siblings did not accept this woman. Relatives report frequent quarrels between the children and the governess, the half-grown children are attached to their mother, but they do not get along with the head of the family.⁶As head of the family, August Thyssen demands unconditional obedience, and anyone who does not comply experiences the strictness of the patriarch. August Thyssen's selfishness and demand to be number one is evident both at home and in the company. Cläre Stinnes, wife of entrepreneur and Thyssen competitor Hugo Stinnes, wrote in her diary about the quarrelsome steel magnate:

"How rarely people can subordinate their own interests to the general interest and how particularly sad one feels such great weaknesses in an otherwise unusually clever, even brilliant man like Thyssen."⁷

Fritz's younger brothers August and Heinrich Thyssen are particularly affected by this. The two are not prepared to put up with their father's simple lifestyle; they want a more stylish place to live and more commitment from their father to be elevated to the nobility by the king. August junior, his father's favorite, therefore secretly went his own way: when the head gave the 24-year-old offspring signing authority for business transactions in 1898 and offered him a position in the Thyssen office in Berlin, the junior enlisted without his knowledge in the Guards Guards squadron in Potsdam, a troop dominated by aristocrats. At the same time, little August - similar in appearance and voice to his father - applies for membership of the aristocratic "Union Club" and acquires the Rüdersdorf manor in order to gain admission to its illustrious circles. Thyssen senior is shocked by August's "submissive nature towards high-ranking people, his inclination towards the nobility" and his changing marriage candidates - who naturally have blue blood running through their veins: "I feel more unhappy than ever before in my life."⁸

Adding to the old man's bad mood is the fact that his son August is increasing the pressure on his father. The junior ultimately demands further payments and wants to be included on the board of the Deutscher Kaiser colliery. The son does not shy away from unsubtle means: he spreads rumors about Thyssen on the Berlin stock exchange and writes to his father's banks. He is later supported in his fight by his brothers Fritz and Heinrich. This infuriates August senior even more: "I see all my hopes destroyed because my children want to and will make the most unworthy and unbelievable use of my achievements." In 1904, the dispute escalated - the father tried to have his son August incapacitated in Berlin and committed to a mental hospital. The son is able to defend himself against this; the doctors find no mental illness in him.

The children's revenge was not long in coming. They decide on a new attack at a meeting in Hamburg in 1906. The siblings borrow money from a Dutch bank and guarantee each other's loans - the basis is their mother's contract for the early transfer of the company. In this way, the Thyssen descendants want to encourage the bank to access the company's assets in order to pay off the debts, thereby undermining the senior. The plan did not work, and the children had to service their loans themselves. August junior overreaches himself: bankruptcy proceedings are initiated against his assets in Berlin in 1910 - his father looks on impassively, at least at first. His advisors warn that "if Mr. Thyssen Sr. dies before this dispute is settled", the administrators of Thyssen's bankruptcy estate or the debtors or the later creditors of Mr. Thyssen Jr. would take steps "to paralyse the management and credit of Thyssen & Co. AG".⁹As a counter-manoeuvre, Thyssen & Co. AG applies for ministerial approval to merge the parts of the company under a new umbrella. August junior then gives up and spends a lot of time traveling. He was never to receive the coveted title of nobility - unlike his siblings Hede and Heinrich. Hede marries Baron Ferdinand von Neufforge and can thus count herself among feudal society. Heinrich marries the Hungarian Baroness Margit Bornemisza, his father-in-law adopts him in 1907, Emperor Franz Joseph allows him to bear the name Thyssen-Bornemisza. Fritz Thyssen fights his battles with his father, but is the only one who manages to hold out over the years in the company of the stern August. He works with him in the company. He shares the fate of many dominant fathers: he is a son by profession. Fritz goes to a Protestant grammar school in Mülheim and then transfers to a Catholic grammar school in Düsseldorf. After leaving school, he worked as an apprentice in the company for a year, with his father making sure that his offspring was not given any privileges. Fritz studied engineering in Liège, London and Berlin. When the eldest son wanted to marry 23-year-old Amelie Zur Helle from Cologne in 1900, his father intervened. August Thyssen does not like the daughter-in-law and demands that the marriage be called off. His adventurous justification: There are hereditary diseases in the Zur Helle family that could infect his own family tree. The head of Thyssen tries to intrigue and talk the bride's parents out of the plan - to no avail. The couple's marriage lasts until Fritz Thyssen's death. Their only child, daughter Anita, who later became Countess Anita Zichy-Thyssen, was not born until nine years after the wedding. In 1905, the couple moved into their parents' home "Froschteich" after the senior gave in to the family's insistence on more befitting representation

and buys and rebuilds Landsberg Castle in the hills near Essen as a new home. One visitor describes her first impression of August Thyssen's estate: "We are only in a small circle, as we had assumed here. The castle is beautiful, in parts very beautiful, the charms of the old castle and the natural beauty of the idyllic location have been used to great advantage, even improved to enhance the whole. The furnishings are elegantly tasteful, without offending through overabundance and ostentation. I found Thyssen's study the most beautiful and cozy, its brown-golden tone extremely calm and refined. Thyssen showed me around his home with unmistakable pride; today he already speaks of his

Today he speaks of his 'castle', months ago only of 'Landsberg'."¹⁰The lord of the castle expects Fritz and the other family members to visit regularly at weekends in order to maintain at least the appearance of an intimate family life - not always to the delight of the guests, as Cläre Stinnes, for example, notes:

"Unfortunately, we are not granted a quiet life today. We have to attend a dinner at Thyssen's, which is fine and stimulating, but from which there is no particular gain. I will never learn to love the official festivities, where more or less only superficial talk is carried on and the ladies' toilets are criticized."¹¹

Fritz and Amelie soon emulate their father and have a more noble home built in the neighborhood of the coal king Emil Kirdorf. The young Thyssens' English-style "country house" in the forest southwest of Mülheim is a sophisticated estate with main and outbuildings, a gatekeeper's house, Corinthian columns and wood-paneled walls, a fountain and a water basin in the park. Despite the stately home, constant contact with his father was unavoidable: August Thyssen provides his son with several positions in the company and now pins all his hopes on Fritz as the future head of the Group. But the irony is that this never happens. Fritz Thyssen always has to make do with second-tier tasks; even in his first important job, as mine manager of the Deutscher Kaiser colliery, he has to share an office with the General Director. Even membership of supervisory boards, such as the Aktien-gesellschaft für Hüttenbetrieb or the Hagendingen steelworks, is not something where you can prove your managerial qualities. But his father remained steadfastly in the most important positions, be it as Chairman of the Board of Directors at Deutscher Kaiser or as the senior controller of the various family companies. And when, after the death of August Thyssen, the family transfers a large part of its business to the newly founded Vereinigte Stahlwerke and becomes the largest single shareholder with a 26 percent stake, Fritz Thyssen renounces his claim to leadership

The 53-year-old leaves the executive chair to Albert Vogler and contents himself with the office of Chairman of the Supervisory Board. Fritz Thyssen obviously lacks the genius and the will to assert himself of the old man, as a friend cautiously put it in 1927: "He's in his fifties. But August Thyssen, his father, only began the greatest of his far-reaching activities on the threshold of his sixth decade. Fritz Thyssen is a collected and completely unspent force whose real achievement certainly still lies in the future."¹²

The merger of the Thyssen assets into the new Vereinigte Stahlwerke conglomerate, and the consequent relinquishment of independence, leads to a dispute with his brother Heinrich. He writes to Fritz Thyssen: "I am not in favor of this trust. This trust is breaking up a large and well-established family business. The plants and companies entrusted to me do not need the trust. Even in times of crisis, these plants and companies have come through without significant outside help and hope to do the same in the future. If the situation of August-Thyssen-Hütte is such that it has to seek a connection to the Trust, then the mine board and those authorized to do so must assume sole responsibility for this. I do not accept such responsibility. My warnings have not been heeded for years. My ideas have not been taken into account."¹³As a result, the dispute leads to an estrangement between the two brothers, Heinrich Thyssen-Bornemisza divides up the real estate and secures pieces of the family fortune, such as export companies and shipyards. Nothing in Fritz Thyssen's life yet points to political ambitions or a right-wing attitude that would lead to Hitler. At the beginning of the First World War, he enlisted as a volunteer and returned to the family business in 1916 at the "urgent request"¹⁴of his father, who wanted him back in the company. He experienced the Soviet Republic of 1918/1919 as a passive observer - except for one episode. This was to strengthen his sympathies for right-wing groups for the first time. On December 7, 1918, communist workers' councillors arrested Fritz Thyssen, put him in an unheated third-class train carriage and took him to Berlin. The charge: treason - punishable by death. For Fritz Thyssen, who had previously only known the luxury of servants, a comfortable home and plenty of money, the prison cell and the rude treatment of the left-wing revolutionaries were a very special experience. After four days, the excitement fizzles out: He is released and the arrest is explained as a misunderstanding. But Fritz Thyssen never forgets his clash with the Marxists for the rest of his life.

The events of 1923 bring him into the political limelight. When the French occupy the Ruhr region to collect the German reparations after the lost world war, Fritz Thyssen dares to resist: as spokesman for the colliery owners, he supports the passive resistance of the population and openly refuses to comply with the orders of the occupying power. The consequences are not long in coming - Fritz Thyssen is arrested and brought before a French military court in Mainz. His defense culminates in the sentence: "I am a German and I refuse to obey French orders on German soil."¹⁵ The court releases him with a mild fine. His return turns into a jubilant celebration, the press suddenly makes Thyssen known throughout the Reich as a resistance hero, and the University of Freiburg awards the industrialist an honorary doctorate "for his services to the preservation of German law during the Ruhr War".

In 1923, however, something even more moving happened for the heir to the company: the meeting with the Bavarian local great Adolf Hitler. In October, Thyssen travels to Munich to visit General Erich Ludendorff, whom he had met at Landsberg Castle during the First World War. "There is only one hope," Ludendorff explains to the steel magnate during the conversation,

"and this hope is embodied in the nationalist groups and their drive for new strength."¹⁶ The general recommends getting to know Adolf Hitler, whom he greatly admires: "He is the only man who has political feeling." Thyssen attends several Nazi events in Munich and hears the Nazi DAP leader speak. "I recognized his oratory skills and his ability to lead the masses," the entrepreneur recalls, "but what impressed me most was the order that prevailed during his appearances, the almost military discipline of his followers."¹⁷ A few days later, Thyssen meets the Nazi dictator in person in the apartment of the Baltic German Max Erwin von Scheubner-Richter, the confidant of Hitler and Ludendorff. They discuss political issues and talk about money. Thyssen is so impressed that he donates 100,000 gold marks, a huge sum in times of hyperinflation: "That was my first contribution to the National Socialist Party."¹⁸ Ludendorff accepts the money, Scheubner-Richter makes sure that his friend Adolf Hitler benefits from it.¹⁹

This makes Thyssen the first major German entrepreneur to actively promote the Nazi movement. Nevertheless, it was to take several years before he moved closer to Hitler again and became his indispensable helper in business circles. At the end of 1928, Rudolf Hess contacted the owner of the company on Hitler's instructions. The reason for the visit was a lack of money. Hitler was planning to buy a new property in Munich, which he wanted to use as a pompous party

centralized. However, as is so often the case, the Nazi dictator lacks the necessary funding for his grandiose plans. For such projects, the comrades' membership fees seem like pocket money. So a donor had to be found, someone who was rich, really rich. Hitler first thinks of Emil Kirdorf, but he refers him to his neighbor Fritz Thyssen. Once again, the industrialist generously lent the Nazis a helping hand: he organized a loan from the Dutch bank Voor Handel en Scheepvaart N.V. in Rotterdam for the desired sum, for which he acted as guarantor. Fritz Thyssen gives the following reason for the detour abroad: "I chose a Dutch bank because in my position I didn't want to have to deal with German banks and because I thought I had the Nazis a little more in hand this way."²⁰ According to his statements from 1945, the sum amounted to "300,000 to 400,000 marks"; the NSDAP had not repaid any of this.²¹ In fact, the borrowed funds were a gift - which the heir to the group must have been aware of in view of Hitler's notorious lack of money. Again, it is surprising at first glance how generous the steel entrepreneur is towards the NSDAP - after all, he was a member of the German National People's Party at the time. His behavior reveals that he has long sympathized with the Nazi movement, even though he would not take the official step of joining the NSDAP until later. Turning to Hitler is Thyssen's most important independent step in the political arena - the first major decision he makes without his father August - and is probably defiantly directed against the spirit of his senior: He would surely turn over in his grave with rage if he saw his son's wasteful airs and graces for a dubious party chairman.

Without Thyssen's money, the financing of the Nazi party headquarters would have failed. In his typical megalomania, Hitler wanted the most imposing headquarters of any German party. His previous residence in Schellingstrasse no longer met his requirements. The total cost of the project is estimated at 800,000 marks. The NSDAP leader acquires the Barlow-Palais on Briener Strasse, near Königsplatz: an exclusive residential area with the publisher Bruckmann in the neighborhood. Here, for the first time, Hitler was able to live out his obsessions as a thwarted architect, a profession he had pursued - in vain - during his time in Vienna alongside painting. The misunderstood artist threw himself into the plans with great enthusiasm, enlisted the support of prominent architect Paul Ludwig Troost, drew his own designs for furniture and doors and had the old building completely rebuilt according to his designs. The result, known as the

known as the "Brown House", exudes the swagger of times gone by:

"Only the swastika flag on the roof convinced me that this was

was not the palace of a cardinal or the luxury residence of a Jewish banker"²², a Nazi describes his first impressions. The building is three storeys high, with a front garden and a fence separating it from the street. Hitler had mezzanines built and walls erected to turn the halls into smaller rooms. To enter the building, guests pass through two bronze portals bearing the names of those killed in the putsch of November 1923. Two SA men in uniform stand guard in front of the entrance. The reception hall is decorated with Nazi standards and a wide staircase leads to the second floor, where Hitler and his confidants work in their offices. In Hitler's corner room, a massive desk with a bust of Mussolini, battle paintings and an oil portrait of Frederick the Great. Next to it is the "Senate Room", in which 60 red leather armchairs are grouped around a horseshoe-shaped table. A separate restaurant in the basement with a chef completes the Munich Nazi headquarters. Did the NSDAP leader also take some of the Thyssen money for himself? In any case, it is striking that at the same time Hitler gives up his sublet room in Thierschstrasse and moves into a nine-room apartment on the second floor at Prinzregentenstrasse 16. He also provided himself with two housekeepers, a chauffeur, a bodyguard and took his niece Geli Raubal into the apartment.

Fritz Thyssen has remained in contact with Hitler since this time, visiting the party leader in Munich. The heir to the company is impressed by Hitler's single-mindedness and ruthlessness, qualities that Thyssen does not possess. The outward clamor is the referendum against the reparation demands of the Young Plan. Not only Hugenberg and Hitler, but also managers such as Emil Kirdorf - and Thyssen - join forces in this common defensive front.

"I turned to the National Socialist Party after I had convinced myself that the fight against the Young Plan was unavoidable in order to avoid the complete collapse of Germany"²³, the industrialist explains his commitment to the radicals around Hitler in retrospect. At the same time, he hoped for an alliance between the right-wing groups to prevent the parties from splintering. But such plans were doomed to failure; the Nazi dictator made clever tactical use of the alliance for his own purposes, to raise the NSDAP's profile at the expense of others. Hitler registers with satisfaction "the very great turnaround" in the public's attention for his movement and finds it "astonishing how the arrogant, snobbish or stupid rejection of the party, which was taken for granted just a few years ago, has been transformed into an expectant attitude".²⁴ Thyssen throws himself into his new task with gusto: he appears at political events, tries to convince other business tycoons in small groups, provides money and his celebrity status to the Nazi party.

names for the referendum. Years later, he too had to admit "that the radical agitation against the Young Plan had enabled Hitler to give his party the necessary momentum to rise to power".²⁵ Another Nazi great profited from the industrialist's cash: Hermann Göring. The contact is made by Wilhelm Tengeimann, himself a convinced Nazi and director of the Essener Steinkohlenbergwerke AG. The manager recommends a certain Mr. Göring in Berlin to Thyssen. He tries "to work for the good of the German people, but he receives very little encouragement from German industrialists. Wouldn't you like to meet him?"²⁶ The Ruhr magnate visited the Nazi in the Reich capital. The two got on well right from the start: Göring seemed like the perfect match for Hitler, and Göring's girth alone was proof of his passion for good wine and exquisite food. He can talk about art and painting in a cultivated manner, shows enthusiasm for the theater, a man of taste and culture - something that can hardly be found in Hitler's entourage. Göring was born in 1893 in Rosenheim, Bavaria, the son of a lawyer. During the First World War, he made a career for himself as the last commander of the Richthofen fighter squadron. He is said to have scored 22 kills, for which he is awarded both the Iron Cross and the Pour le Mérite, earning him a reputation as a successful pilot and war hero. In 1922, he married the Swede Karin Freiin von Kantzow, née Fock, and in the same year Hitler appointed him commander of the SA.

Göring's penchant for aristocracy - he describes himself as "the last Renaissance man" - is not alien to Fritz Thyssen either. The only problem is that the Nazi functionary lacked the necessary small change for a princely lifestyle. But the steel heir shows understanding: "He lived in a very small apartment at the time and was very keen to enlarge it to make a better impression," Thyssen recalls, "I paid for it. At the time, Göring struck me as a very pleasant person. He was very reasonable in political matters. I also met his first wife, Karin, a Swedish countess by birth. She was an extremely charming woman."²⁷ Thyssen gave Göring three gifts of 50,000 marks each.²⁸ According to the industrialist's employees, the money was handed over like in a bad mafia movie: On one occasion Thyssen has the sum transported in cash to the restaurant of one of his smelting works, where he and Göring dine. Thyssen discreetly passes on the bundles of banknotes. Another time, the company heir deposits the banknotes in the safe deposit box of a bank. Göring later goes there, opens the box with his spare key and packs the money into a suitcase he has brought with him. Göring later explained that he had passed some of the money on to Hitler.

Thyssen's open-hearted and generous behavior towards the Nazi movement



Reich Minister Goebbels in conversation with Fritz Thyssen

shows in exemplary fashion that the greats of the German financial elite did not have to be formal NSDAP members to actively support Hitler and his troops. This is particularly evident in the decisive months of the seizure of power in 1933. Thyssen was still a member of the German National People's Party when he had long been supporting the Nazi dictator. The industrialist played a confusing game about his party membership. He had already been considered a Hitler fan since around 1930 due to his public statements in support of the Nazis. He himself claimed to have joined the NSDAP in December 1931. According to the party's central register, however, Thyssen only officially joined the Nazis on March 1, 1933, receiving the membership number 2 917299. His second wife Amelie, membership number 522386, was already a National Socialist in March 1931.

But these are formalities for Thyssen. Long before Hitler became Chancellor, he already felt himself to be a Nazi in heart and soul. Now he has a task that fulfills him. His distrust of Marxism, Weimar democracy and his penchant for authoritarian forms of government are already evident in the founding call of the "League for the Renewal of the Reich" on January 6, 1928

signed by Thyssen, Albert Vogler, Carl Bergman from Deutsche Bank, Gustav Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach, Carl Friedrich von Siemens and Robert Bosch. "If clarity and unity take the place of struggle and friction, then political forces will be freed up for overall German tasks that are currently tied up and consumed internally," the document states, "the will to overcome strife and multi-government must flare up everywhere in the German people. The Third Reich must be built, which unites the whole nation in a healthy organization according to the words of Baron von Stein: "I have only one fatherland, that is Germany!"²⁹ Thyssen feels most secure in his political activities in the field of economics, which is where he begins his work. In order to inculcate the National Socialists with a greater understanding of economics and at the same time popularize right-wing ideas among business leaders, Thyssen supports the journalist Walther Funk, to whom the Mining Association regularly donates a small sum. The son of a building contractor, Funk studied law, economics and philosophy and had been working on the editorial staff of the right-wing "Berliner Börsenzeitung" since 1916. Funk took over as editor-in-chief in 1922. At the beginning of the 1930s, he joined the Nazi movement and became Hitler's personal economic advisor and liaison to entrepreneurs. Funk formulates the "Economic Reconstruction Program of the NSDAP" and uses his own publication, the "Economic Policy Service", as a propaganda tool for the Nazis. Thyssen sees the economic editor as a moderate force within the NSDAP, intended to dampen and steer the left-wing Nazis. "No less important than Funk's programmatic achievements in 1931 and 1932 was his work at the time as the Führer's intermediary with the leading men in German industry, trade, commerce and finance," states a celebratory biography of Funk, published by the Nazi-owned Eher-Verlag. "His personal relationships with German business leaders were extensive and far-reaching due to his previous work. He was now able to put them at the service of Adolf Hitler and not only answer many questions authentically, but also convince him and recruit him as a supporter of the party. That was a tremendously valuable job at the time."³⁰ In his interrogations after the Second World War, Funk defined his task more cautiously: "Through personal influence on the Führer and the party leadership as a whole" he wanted to do good.

"In conversations with me and the business leaders I introduced him to, the Führer himself repeatedly emphasized that he was an enemy of the state economy and the so-called planned economy."³¹ This attempt to whitewash himself did not help the later Nazi Minister of Economic Affairs - he was

was sentenced to life imprisonment as a war criminal in 1946, but was released early in 1958.

Funk appeared to be the ideal transmission belt for Thyssen in the years leading up to the seizure of power. The Nazi economic ideologue had contacts with the financial elite. This is shown, for example, by a letter from Flick manager Otto Steinbrinck to Funk, dated December 1931: "Baron Kurt von Schröder, co-owner of Bankhaus J. H. Stein in Cologne and cousin of the well-known London banker, is in Berlin today and tomorrow and would have liked to speak to you briefly. He has been close to the whole movement for several years and was therefore particularly sympathetic when I told him about your new ideas on foreign reconnaissance. Since Baron von Schröder himself has very extensive foreign connections and frequently meets with foreign bankers due to his close friendship and family ties with the London World House, he is naturally concerned with the party's position on the issue of foreign debt."³² When the journalist therefore asks for the sum of 100,000 marks for his work, Thyssen immediately says yes. He arranges for Ludwig Grauert, Managing Director of the Northwest Group of the Employers' Association of the German Iron and Steel Industry, to take the money from the association's coffers and hand it over to Funk. This leads to a scandal: Ernst Poensgen, head of the association and manager of Vereinigte Stahlwerke, learns of the secret withdrawal of money and protests against it; Grauert is to be dismissed. Thyssen saves the manager's neck by saying that the money was only intended as a loan and that he had paid the 100,000 marks himself⁽³³⁾.

Unfortunately, the recipient does not handle the money the way Thyssen imagines. This becomes apparent during a trip to Munich by Funk: together with his NS supervisor Otto Wagener, he plunges into the nightlife of the Bavarian capital. First of all, Funk drinks a lot of alcohol in a restaurant. Then he persuades the orchestra to play a song for him that he wanted to sing. He gives the bandleader 100 marks in return; that's more money than an unemployed person has to live on in a month. When the other guests complain about the karaoke interlude, the manager of the restaurant throws Funk out. Afterwards, the Nazi economist visits a night bar and loudly orders champagne. Funk drinks a few sips, disappears into the ladies' room, comes back, holding the toilet attendant's hand, does a few laps around the dance floor with the baffled lady and slips her a hundred-mark bill as a reward. The result: Funk is also thrown out of the nightclub. On his way out, he shouts to the regulars: "That's National Socialism!"³⁴

Thyssen is about bigger things. This is evident in his commitment to

the National Socialists in the so-called Ruhrlade - the most secretive industrialist organization in the Weimar Republic. The very name "Lade" signals a game of hide-and-seek and a conspiratorial brotherhood. In fact, this body secretly steered the fortunes of entire industries and tried to intervene in the wheels of politics. The idea for this secret organization was developed in 1927 by Paul Reusch, head of Gutehoffnungshütte. He writes a constitution for this unregistered association, sends the document to Gustav Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach, chief controller of Fried. Krupp AG - and to Fritz Thyssen. The trio meets on November 19, 1927 and discusses the details of their new baby: they fine-tune the statutes, discuss the aim and purpose of this Ruhrlade and decide that the circle will be limited to twelve men. They send invitations for membership to the other nine personalities in heavy industry, and all nine business tycoons immediately accept. The elite circle, which remains unchanged until the end of 1932, includes the following names: In addition to Reusch, Krupp and Thyssen, General Director Erich Fickler of Harpener Bergbau AG, Peter Klöckner, founder of Klöckner-Werke, Arthur Klotzbach, Director at Krupp, Karl Haniel, co-owner and Chairman of the Supervisory Board of Gutehoffnungshütte, Ernst Poensgen, Director of Vereinigte Stahlwerke, Albert Vogler, CEO of Vereinigte Stahlwerke, Fritz Springorum, General Director of Hoesch AG, Fritz Winkhaus, General Director of Köln-Neuessener Bergwerkverein, and Paul Silverberg, Chairman of the Supervisory Board of Rheinische AG für Braunkohlenbergbau und Brikettenfabrikation.³⁵

On the evening of January 9, 1928, this cream of the Ruhr economy travels to Villa Hügel near Essen, the Krupp family's retreat, a massive new building in the style of a palace. All twelve people, most of them between 50 and 60 years old, appear in black tuxedos, appropriate for the festive occasion. After a brief discussion, the troupe unanimously adopts the statutes. The rules stipulate that the loose association meets monthly, on the first Monday of each month. There may never be more than twelve members, nor are guests or deputies permitted. Any of the twelve honorable gentlemen may resign from the club; the election of a new member requires unanimity by secret ballot. A three-quarters majority is required to amend the articles of association, while a simple majority is sufficient for the final dissolution of the body.

For Thyssen and its colleagues, this shadow government of the coal and steel industry is the ideal vehicle for actively pursuing interest politics. The results of these informal meetings do not reach the outside world. As the most influential men in the industry are gathered around the table, there is no danger that anyone will be unable to implement the decisions. The Ruhrlade serves a variety of purposes: it settles disputes between companies in the industry.

It draws up plans for a common stance in wage negotiations and in defending against workers' strikes. The members particularly value price agreements and setting production quotas without having to form an official cartel. The twelve conspirators intensify contacts with other sectors of the economy such as the electrical industry or the agricultural sector. The Ruhrlade also serves to satisfy their vanity: The members organize joint hunts and excursions, they invite each other to show off their pretentious domiciles with pride of ownership.

However, the most important purposes of the Ruhrlade are politics and money. Industrialists try to exert influence on the government and political parties in order to promote forces that act in the interests of the economy. To this end, the corporate magnates use their personal relationships and exert pressure in confidential talks with politicians. The fact that all members hold offices in various companies and associations provides a tailwind. Krupp, for example, became chairman of the Reich Association of German Industry in 1931, while Springorum had been chairman of the Langnam Association, a powerful regional lobby group, since 1930. Personal persuasion alone was not enough. Thyssen, Krupp and the other Ruhrlade members decide to set up a political fund to support parties and individual politicians. The sums are considerable, fluctuating between 1.2 and 1.5 million marks a year.³⁶ The money is managed internally under the code name "Economic Aid Account".

Initially, the Ruhrlade co-financed the bourgeois and right-wing parties with various amounts and paid subsidies to pro-business newspapers. But the electoral success of the NSDAP in September 1930 and Fritz Thyssen's open sympathy for the Nazi movement caused a dispute in the club of twelve. Thyssen pushes for financial support for Hitler and his party. He even carries out propaganda himself and sends a pack of Nazi brochures to Paul Reusch, asking him to distribute the material to the other Ruhrlade members. Reusch obeys, he who apostrophizes Hitler's foreign policy impact "not as an undesirable phenomenon". As a first step, Thyssen succeeds in securing financial support for his protégé Walther Funk. Springorum pleads for the "sensible" National Socialists to be given a helping hand by the Ruhrlade making the NSDAP dependent on business donations - as a result, money obviously flows in.⁽³⁷⁾ Encouraged by Thyssen, Reusch also launches an attempt to convince Hitler of the necessity of a coalition with the Bavarian People's Party. He therefore travels to the Nazi dictator in Munich. As a lure, the boss offers

of the Gutehoffnungshütte, the good behavior of the newspapers "Münchener Neueste Nachrichten" and "Fränkischer Kurier" towards Hitler - because Reusch holds significant stakes in both papers through his group. The Nazi DAP leader apparently accepts the offer, but only a short time later he lashes out again at his political opponent, the People's Party.

Thyssen's work for the National Socialists within the Ruhrlade bore further fruit: Paul Silverberg, a baptized Protestant, suspected by the Nazis of being a "non-Aryan", also tried to get closer to Hitler. To this end, he uses Werner von Alvensleben, secretary of the right-wing

"gentlemen's club" in Berlin. After a meeting with Silverberg, Alvensleben sends a transcript of the conversation to Hitler. According to it, Silverberg sees the NSDAP divided into a socialist and a moderate faction, he wants to strengthen the non-radical forces and accept the NSDAP if the economy is better received.

Alvensleben sends two more letters to Hitler, asking him to receive Otto Meynen, the private secretary of the "Jewish descendant" Silverberg. The confidant's visit to Hitler finally took place in his suite at the Kaiserhof Hotel in Berlin, but without any tangible results. Silverberg had more success with another prominent Nazi:

Otto Strasser. The company boss sends him money via his secretary

Meynen.³⁸Thyssen continuously intensifies its advertising for the brown troops.

Even the chief propagandist Joseph Goebbels likes this: "Thyssen of the old school.

Knorke," notes the Nazi, "a capitalist, but you can put up with such business

leaders. His wife is very nice and agreeable."³⁹Thyssen pulled off a special coup:

Hitler, who had previously only spoken in a small circle of entrepreneurs and managers, was now to appear before an important circle of business personalities.

The occasion is the discussion about the planned invitation from the "Industry Club" in Düsseldorf - they want to invite a prominent politician to give a lecture.

The "Industrial Club" includes not only the Ruhr barons, but also bankers, publishers and business lawyers. Thyssen proposes to the National Socialists and

discusses the case with Hitler when he meets his Nazi idol in Berlin. He

immediately seizes the opportunity and announces that he wants to speak

personally in Düsseldorf. Following an invitation from club chairman Karl Haniel,

the Nazi leader writes back that he is looking forward to the opportunity to "present

my thoughts to a large number of well-known businessmen". So the President

wrote to his illustrious members inviting them to an evening with "Mr. Adolf

Hitler, Munich". No topic is mentioned.

The evening of January 27, 1932 turns into a special event in Düsseldorf. Ruhr

celebrities such as Krupp ask for tickets. Chairman Ha-

niel writes to Gustav Krupp

von Bohlen und Halbach: "The rush of club

members to the Hitler lecture exceeds my wildest expectations and unfortunately the largest hall in the Parkhotel cannot be made any larger than it is. I have therefore had to turn down all similar requests to admit non-members for reasons of fairness. But I realize that your case is special. If you were to come in person, you would naturally be given your place, and as the owner of the Krupp company and also chairman of the Reich Association of German Industry, you have a legitimate interest in obtaining the most detailed knowledge of all economic policy issues."⁴⁰ According to newspaper reports, around 600 people crowded into the "Industrieklub". As the normal rooms were not big enough, the meeting moved to the large ballroom of the "Parkhotel". In addition to Haniel, the audience included the industrialists Albert Vogler, Ernst Poensgen and Ernst Brandi. After the appearance of the Bürgerschreck had become known in advance, a crowd gathered in front of the building, mostly left-wing demonstrators, who greeted visitors with jeers and insults, distributed leaflets and engaged in fights with police and SA men. For fear of stone-throwers, the hotel management orders the shutters to be lowered on the ground and second floors. Hitler drives up to the side entrance in a limousine shortly before six o'clock in the evening. Instead of the brown shirt uniform with belt and armband, the guest of honor wears a white shirt and a black suit without party insignia. Hermann Göring accompanies him. As Hitler enters the hall, someone shouts: "Everyone stand up!" Some people did indeed rise from their chairs. It is not the chairman of the association, as usual, who welcomes the guests, but Robert Lehr, Lord Mayor of Düsseldorf. The speaker remains on a balustrade during the speech, leaning on the cast-iron railing. For over two hours, Hitler's outpourings rain down on the audience like a downpour. The NSDAP leader starts slowly, lets his words flow and increases his facial expressions and gestures. The initial skepticism of those present gives way. According to the speech transcript, at the end there is "stormy, prolonged applause". The press observers do not register any booing or even whistling. Hitler's press officer Otto Dietrich describes the audience's reactions as follows: "Heads begin to redden, eyes hang on the Führer's lips, you can feel hearts warming up. They follow inwardly, are deeply moved. First their hands shake timidly, then there is a roar of applause."⁴¹ Fritz Thyssen, known as a bad speaker, then reads out a statement for eight minutes in a bumpy and rushed manner and wants to end with a programmatic "Heil Hitler!", but in the excitement only manages a "Heil, Herr Hitler!". According to Dietrich, Thyssen's "liberating confession" was "that only the National Socialist movement and the spirit of its leader could turn Germany's fate around". At the subsequent dinner - a cold platter for 2.20 marks

- the Nazi leader has already disappeared again; he follows an invitation from Thyssen to dinner. Hitler's press officer is satisfied: "The ice had been broken, the National Socialist idea had found fertile ground in important and influential circles of the system."

Thyssen himself later records: "The speech made a deep impression on the assembled industrialists and as a result a number of large contributions flowed from the sources of heavy industry into the coffers of the National Socialist Party."⁴²

Hitler's speech to the Düsseldorf "Industrial Club" becomes famous. Not only because more business tycoons than ever before listened to his distorted arguments or because the newspapers made sure that this event was publicized. But because the public commitment of Ruhr icon Fritz Thyssen to the Nazis made it clear to everyone that the wind was changing. This sends a signal: Germany's business elite will no longer leave the brown ruffians standing in the corner. The evening is also significant because the NSDAP leader gives a keynote speech on his economic ideas for the first time. Precisely because left-wing National Socialists such as Otto Strasser or Gottfried Feder repeatedly demanded things that sounded like the devil's incantations to the ears of entrepreneurs, such as the dictation of the state over companies or the expropriation of individual sectors of the economy. That's why the guests and media in Düsseldorf are curious to know what the top boss himself thinks. And Hitler has indeed been eating chalk: He skillfully addresses the concerns and needs of the company leaders, scrupulously avoiding the impression of a radical or political zealot.

Hitler admits that "today the National Socialist movement is categorized in wide circles in Germany as anti-economic"⁴³, only to immediately add that it only seems that way. The supreme ideologue did not accept external circumstances for a nation's problems: "I am of the opinion that there is no process caused by human will that cannot be changed by another human being." In doing so, Hitler addresses the politicians and offers his own definition of what he understands by responsible government action: "Politics is nothing other and can be nothing other than the perception of the vital interests of a people and the practical implementation of its struggle for life by all means." Economics must subordinate itself to this primacy: "Of course, in order to live, a people will need an economy," Hitler exclaims. "But this economy is only one of the functions of this national body in order to exist." It is striking that the NSDAP chairman refrains from his usual outbursts against the Jews on this subject. This tactic was aimed at his loyal listeners in the Düsseldorf "Industrieklub" - many of whom found militant anti-Semitism anathema.

To this end, Hitler links the racial question with democracy, which he presents "as the negation of the diversity of the disposition, the performance of the individual peoples", which he translates as "rule of stupidity" instead of "rule of the people". The Nazi propagandist cleverly translates his endlessly varied "principle of struggle and achievement" of a people into the mindset of his audience; anyone who may have dozed off at Hitler's torrent of words before is now wide awake: "You have the opinion, gentlemen, that the German economy must be built on the idea of private property. Now you can practically only uphold such an idea of private property if it somehow appears logically sound. This idea must draw its ethical justification from the insight into natural necessity. It cannot be motivated simply by saying: "It was like this before, so it must continue to be like this." These are the issues that raise the blood pressure of entrepreneurs like Thyssen, where they sense the resentment of the working class, where fear of the Marxists flares up. In his speech, Hitler draws clever rhetorical analogies to the leadership principle in politics. He presupposes that people's achievements are different, and therefore the results of these achievements are also different; this forces differences in value in the economy. "It is absurd to base life economically on the idea of performance, of the value of personality, and thus practically on the authority of personality, but to deny this authority of personality politically and to push the law of greater numbers, democracy, in its place," Hitler concludes and continues with his skewed arguments: "However, communism is analogous to political democracy in the economic field. We are now in a period in which these two basic principles are wrestling with each other in all border areas and are already penetrating the economy." Democracy as a synonym for communism - strong stuff for the guests in Düsseldorf. The unspoken thought is forcing itself upon them: Only the rule, the dictatorship of a single strong leader, like the management principle in companies, will turn everything around for the best.

Hitler also attempted an analysis of the global economy in front of the assembled economic expertise, again combined with warnings about the dangers of Marxism. "The rationalization of the economy, starting from the beginning of the rationalization of the basic economy, leads to a saving of human labour, a saving that is only useful if the saved forces can be easily transferred to new branches of the economy." For the NSDAP leader, the unemployed run straight into the arms of the Marxists. He thus startles the managers: "Do you believe that if seven or eight million people have only been out of the national production process for ten or twenty years

"When seven or eight million people have been excluded from the national production process for ten or twenty years, do you believe that for these masses of people Bolshevism could be anything other than the logical ideological supplement to their actual practical economic situation?" Hitler shouts into the hall, "do you really believe that the purely spiritual side of this catastrophe can be overlooked without it one day translating into the economy as the evil curse of the evil deed?" After these rousing words, Hitler makes it clear to the industrialists that of course only one group can clean up the mess: the National Socialists, the friends of the entrepreneurs.

As Hitler is already making a stop in the Ruhr region for his "Industry Club" speech, Thyssen takes advantage of the opportunity to establish contacts with other industrialists on his behalf. The day after the Nazi leader's appearance in Düsseldorf, Thyssen invites him to a private meeting at Landsberg Castle. The guests are Albert Vogler and Ernst Poensgen, the board members of Vereinigte Stahlwerke, as well as Hitler, Göring and Ernst Röhm. The managers attempt to discuss economic issues with the NSDAP leader. He refuses to commit himself to specific statements and philosophizes endlessly about political commonplaces. Göring asks the managers for suitable candidates for the post of Reich Minister of Labor - although a Nazi takeover of power still sounds utopian at the beginning of January 1932. For this reason, the steel board members just shake their heads at Göring's advances. The group leaves without any useful result. Thyssen is not letting up. He regularly arranges confidential meetings with leading National Socialists in the coming months until the change of government in January 1933, for example in September 1932: "I invited a number of gentlemen to my house so that they could put questions to Hitler," Thyssen later says, "Hitler answered all the questions addressed to him to the complete satisfaction of all those present."⁴⁴In the autumn, for example, he sends out formal letters of invitation for a "debate" with Hitler at Landsberg Castle on October 21. Albert Vogler and Emil Kirdorf also take part. The group discusses the financing of the ailing NSDAP for the next Reichstag elections. The results do not get out. For left-wing newspapers, it was a conspiracy between big business and the Nazis: "Freiheit" described the event as a "secret conference" on October 23; "Hitler at Thyssen" was reported in "Rote Fahne" on October 25.

At this time, the NSDAP thought it was at its peak: it won 230 seats in the last Reichstag election on July 1, making it the strongest party in parliament, ahead of the SPD, which won 133 seats. However, the very next election on November 6 brought a cold shower for the Nazis: instead of gaining more votes, the party fell in the electorate's favor and only won 196 seats. "When the NSDAP suffered its first setback on November 6, 1932

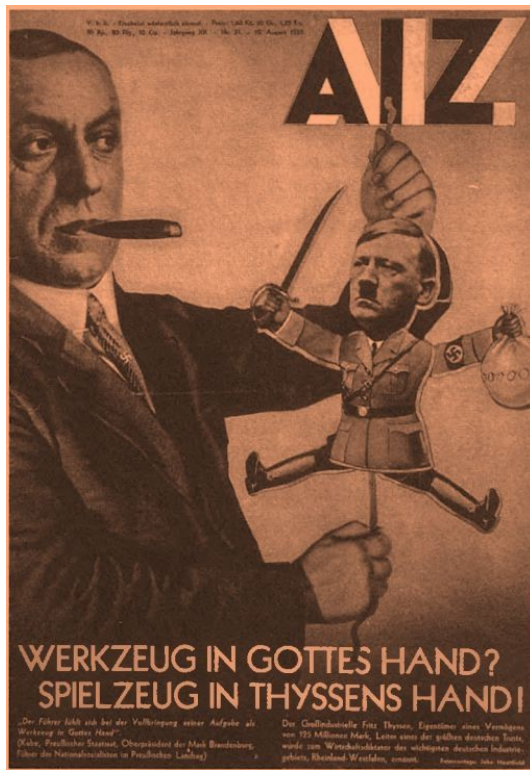
and had therefore passed its peak, support from the German economy became particularly urgent"⁴⁵, says the banker Kurt von Schröder after the Second World War. Thyssen now also became more actively involved in the discussion among his business colleagues about the right policy. Some prefer Alfred Hugenberg's German National People's Party, others want to persuade Hitler to join a coalition government as a junior partner. The company heir is particularly irritated by the attempt of business circles to get the Nazi functionary Gregor Strasser, who is considered controllable, into a government bypassing the NSDAP leader. By this time, Thyssen had long since decided on one person: Adolf Hitler. The industrialist makes this clear in a letter dated November 11 to Max Schlenker, the managing director of the Association for the Protection of Common Economic Interests in the Rhineland and Westphalia, the so-called Langnam Association. The letter is almost tantamount to a profession of faith on the part of Fritz Thyssen:

"National Socialism knows only one leader, whose ideas represent the essence of the movement and who alone is called upon to give Germany the form of government, beyond all compromises and obstacles, which alone is capable, according to human judgment, of standing up to the overthrow and destruction of European civilization. Let us make no mistake about it, events have progressed too far for there to be any possibility of compromises of a fundamental nature. Only Adolf Hitler can put the true ideas of national socialism into practice. The last election campaign proved the dangers to which a movement with such highly idealistic motives is exposed when the discussion of its goals becomes the common property of a large mass of people. In my opinion, it is quite irresponsible to expose such a movement to such dangers, which can only, as happened with the Reformation, be forced out of its straight and clear path. If we agree on Hitler as Chancellor - any other solution would be unacceptable to his supporters - I believe, speaking purely personally, that we could agree on the aims of his policy, whereby in my opinion only the economic side presents some difficulties."⁴⁶ Thyssen sends a copy of the letter to the NSDAP grandee Rudolf Hess to clarify his political position. The representative of the German business elite thus once again proves himself to be an enthusiastic Hitler disciple. It is therefore only logical that Fritz Thyssen goes one step further just a few days later: as the most prominent industrialist in the Ruhr, he signs a petition to Reich President Paul von Hindenburg calling on the head of state to appoint Hitler as Chancellor.

After his talks with the Nazi leader, Thyssen believed he would be able to implement his ideas of a corporative state in the coming Third Reich. This philosophy of a clearly structured society in which every person has a defined place is fed by various sources. As a practising Catholic, Thyssen was inspired by the social teachings of Pope Leo XIII and Pope Pius XI and attended meetings of the Catholic Association of Academics in Maria Laach. There, the heir to the Group became acquainted with the Viennese professor Othmar Spann and his theories on social equalization in the form of corporatism - as an alternative to democracy. Thyssen would not let go of this: in future, every citizen should work for the common good within their sociological group, but should not leave these boundaries if at all possible. In 1933, Hitler allowed him to set up his Institute of the Estates in Düsseldorf. Thyssen's naivety in believing that such abstruse ideas, mixed with monarchist elements, could be realized under Nazi rule is astonishing. Disillusionment was not long in coming.

After Hitler's appointment as Reich Chancellor, Fritz Thyssen appears transformed - the dawn of Nazi rule acts as a vitamin boost for him. Under the protective umbrella of the National Socialists, the industrialist can rightly feel like the number one in the economy. The other companies already felt this on March 23, 1933, the day on which parliament passed the infamous Enabling Act. At the conference of the Reich Association of German Industry, the highest economic association, Thyssen mercilessly settles accounts with his colleagues who were skeptical of the Nazis. "The national revolution is not yet over, it has not stumbled over communism and will not stumble over the straw of the Reichsverband," says Thyssen, "it must be ensured that in future it is impossible for a counter-current to arise against the national movement in Germany."⁴⁷ The Hitler supporter declares the phase of liberalism to be over. A "new spirit" must now enter the Reichsverband. He therefore called on all members of the association's presidium to resign in order to make way for new forces; they were "dragging the Weimar Republic along".

Thyssen is particularly bothered by the humiliations of the past: he recalls how he was booed because of his support for the national movement, how he had to endure the ridicule of his colleagues when he initiated meetings between Hitler and industry. Chairman Gustav Krupp in particular became the target of Thyssen's criticism because he refused to come to the evening with Hitler at Landsberg Castle in the fall of 1932. Thyssen is upset by the fact that the board members of the Reichsverband have only recently announced



Photomontage by John Heartfield for the cover of the communist magazine "Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung"

ordered the National Socialist flag, which some employees had hoisted, to be taken down from the roof. Instead, the Group heir praises the SA men who forced their way into the building and raised the flag again. There is no doubt: this March 23 is Fritz Thyssen's day, demonstrating his new power to the assembled industrialists, showing that he is capable of top performance even without his father - as a Nazi functionary.

It is a power by Hitler's grace. The dictator is indebted to his famous helper: No other industrialist did so much for him before he came to power. How much money did Fritz Thyssen invest in his National Socialist project? The figures vary, Thyssen himself made contradictory statements after the war. "I personally gave the National Socialist Party a total of one million marks"⁴⁸, says Thyssen

during the Third Reich - an amount that is probably closest to the truth. However, the immaterial value of the famous capitalist's early public support for Hitler's rise to power cannot be quantified in monetary terms.

Thyssen's happiness with the brown dictator does not last long. It is no longer possible to determine exactly when the first cracks began to appear. A shocking experience for the National Socialist Thyssen came in 1936, when Hitler had his Institute for Estates closed. Such backward-looking fluff does not fit into the Nazi concept of the "national community". The synchronization of all major economic associations under the NSDAP's thumb is practically complete. Thyssen falls seriously ill and is barely able to work for a year and a half. He has long been isolated from those in power; on his 65th birthday in November 1938, only the Reich Economics Minister Walther Funk sends a congratulatory telegram from his former financial backers, Hitler and Göring make no mention of themselves. The first climax of the persecution of Jews in November 1938 leads to the politician Carl-Christian Schmid being threatened and driven out of office because of his Jewish wife. Thyssen is appalled by this and angrily resigns from office in a letter to Göring dated November 17: "In view of the recent events which, among other things, led to the expulsion of my friend, the District President of Düsseldorf, Mr. Schmid, a particularly proven civil servant, which in my opinion seriously violated the authority of the state, I request that I be relieved of my post as State Councillor."⁴⁹Göring does not respond to the letter.

Thyssen remains a member of the Reichstag - even though parliament has long since degenerated into an alibi event for the Nazis. In the course of 1939, it becomes increasingly clear that Hitler is driving Germany into war. Thyssen makes no secret of his opposition to this policy among friends and acquaintances. The invasion of Poland is imminent when Thyssen receives a telegram on August 31, 1939 from his residence in Bad Gastein, where he has gone for a cure due to his failing health. The content of the telegram: Reichstag deputy Thyssen should travel to Berlin immediately to support the invasion of Poland at the parliamentary session on September 1. On the same day, Thyssen sends a telegram back to Reichstag President Göring: "Received request from Gauleitung Essen to be ready to fly to Berlin. I cannot comply with this request due to unsatisfactory state of health. In my opinion, a kind of truce should be possible in order to gain time for negotiations. I am against war. A war will also make Germany dependent on Russia for raw materials and thus lose its position as a world power."⁵⁰That is twofold.

fellows a courageous act by Fritz Thyssen - and a dangerous one. For Hitler, of course, had not the slightest intention of letting any individual dissuade him from his desire for conquest. Rather, anyone who tries to stand in his way or refuses to follow him must become his enemy. The dictator also made this clear in his Reichstag speech: "But whoever believes that he can oppose this national commandment, whether directly or indirectly, will fall! Traitors have nothing to do with us!"⁵¹ Thyssen knows this too. His life is in danger. His siblings urge him to leave the country immediately. He and his wife Amelie travel to neutral Switzerland on September 2, 1939. His daughter and son-in-law followed shortly afterwards. The family is safe.

Thyssen sends several letters to Göring and Hitler from his place of refuge. The fugitive is offered the chance to return home without punishment - those in power are nervous and know how dangerous such a prominent economist can be in press reports. Thyssen links his return to the Nazis' promise "that the German public will be informed that I voted against the war as a member of the Reichstag. If other members of parliament have voted in the same way, their vote should also be made public."⁵² This is an affront to Hitler and his henchmen. Thyssen follows up and, in a letter to Göring dated October 1, 1939, calls for Germany to return to constitutional conditions, calling himself a political opponent of National Socialism.

This time the reaction was immediate: in November 1939 the dictator had the Thyssens expelled from the party, and in February 1940 the couple lost their German citizenship. The dictator also seizes the Thyssens' assets; in December 1939 the Reich confiscates all valuables - Fritz Thyssen had previously owned three-fifths of the share capital of Thyssen & Co AG, but now everything becomes the property of the state of Prussia. A clever maneuver by Göring: he thus secures personal access to the works of art of his long-time patron Fritz Thyssen. He wrote a disappointed letter to his former idol at the beginning of 1940, in which the expropriated corporate heir stated that it had been his "only mistake" "that I believed in you, the Führer Adolf Hitler, and the movement led by you".⁵³ Goebbels wrote angrily in his diary: "Thyssen has sent the Führer a letter of treason with the threat to publish it. Our corrupt economy! A piece of pork!"⁵⁴ A short time later Thyssen does indeed hand over his correspondence with Hitler and Göring to the international press in Paris; the American magazine "Life" prints excerpts. After these actions, the pavement becomes too hot for Thyssen and he prepares to move to Ar

to Argentina, a country he knew well from his earlier trips abroad. Switzerland also made it clear that it did not want to accommodate the unruly fugitive as a permanent guest in the country.

But one event temporarily throws Thyssen off track: his mother Hedwig is dying. In April 1940, he travels to Brussels in a hurry. It gets even worse: his wife Amelie suffers a breakdown, so moving to South America is out of the question for the time being. The couple recovers in Monte Carlo. There, Thyssen accepts the offer of journalist Emery Reves to publish a memoir with revelations about the Nazi regime. In April 1940, the exile signs an author's contract and records his story in a series of interviews with Reves over the course of three weeks. The journalist writes a book as a ghostwriter with the help of the stenographed statements, Thyssen corrects most of the manuscripts. The German troops in France and the armistice with the French suddenly make it urgent for the couple to leave for Argentina. But the French authorities refuse to allow them to continue their journey. The Thyssens are trapped. At the end of 1940, the French arrest the couple and extradite them to Germany on Hitler's orders. Fritz Thyssen is now in the hands of his enemies and faces the very fate he wanted to escape.

On January 2, 1941, the Gestapo sent the refugee couple to the insane asylum in Neubabelsberg near Potsdam. In this way, the Nazi rulers hope to portray the Thyssens as mentally ill and release them as "cured" if they show understanding. Göring spoke to Fritz Thyssen personally on February 2, 1941 and offered him the chance to return to Landsberg Castle as a free man and get his fortune back. The only condition: Thyssen must submit a petition for clemency to Hitler. The prisoner refuses. Such a prostration would mean betraying his convictions. This made the break with the Nazi regime final. To make matters worse, the journalist Reves had meanwhile published the book in London and New York under the title

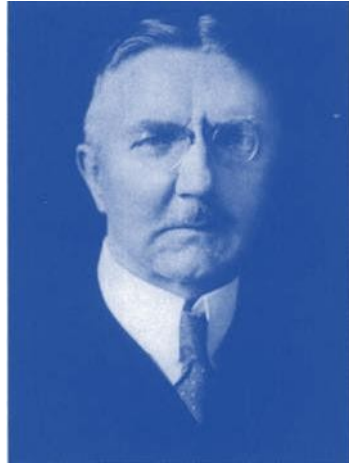
"Thyssen: I paid Hitler". Newspapers all over the world publish passages. The couple remained in the asylum for a year and a half. Thyssen spends his 70th birthday in November 1943 behind the bars of the mental hospital. A few weeks later, the doors of the asylum opened for the couple - but not to freedom. The two were taken to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. They suffer for over a year like tens of thousands of other prisoners. On February 11, 1945 - Germany is in agony, the end of the war is near - the Thyssens are transferred to Buchenwald concentration camp. As early as April 3, the Nazis order the prisoners to be transferred to Regensburg prison, from where they are sent to Dachau concentration camp. Their last stop was Niederndorf near Toblach in the Puster Valley. There

Fritz and Amelie Thyssen are executed. The approaching Americans save their lives.

Back in freedom, the couple spend a relaxing vacation on Capri. But their independence does not last long. The Americans arrest Fritz Thyssen and his wife is released to Munich. Thyssen is interrogated and is to be charged as a war criminal - or at least testify as a witness. In October 1947, the occupying forces transfer him to the state government of Hesse, where a court case is opened against him in Königstein. The verdict in October 1948 is: Fritz Thyssen is considered "less incriminated" and 15 percent of his assets are confiscated as punishment. Only now, after an almost eight-year odyssey through prisons and concentration camps, is Thyssen truly free.

He finally travels to Argentina with his wife, daughter Anita and their sons. His carefree life does not last long: on February 8, 1951, Fritz Thyssen dies of a heart attack at the age of 77.

However, he does not find his final resting place in Argentina. Two years later, on the anniversary of his death, Fritz Thyssen is buried in the family crypt at Landsberg Castle. Even in death, he has his father August above him: he rests in a sarcophagus above his son.



HJALMAR SCHACHT

The technocrat

Uproar in courtroom 600 of the Nuremberg courthouse. Typists clatter on their machines, messengers run back and forth, the spectators shift nervously in their seats. The calendar shows April 30, 1946: separated by a wooden balustrade, the most prominent Nazis sit in the front row of the courtroom: on the left Hermann Göring, next to him Rudolf Hess, Joachim von Ribbentrop, Wilhelm Keitel, Ernst Kaltenbrunner, Alfred Rosenberg, Hans Frank, Wilhelm Frick, Julius Streicher, Walther Funk. And on the far right, with a fixed face, in a crumpled, ill-fitting gray suit, with frameless glasses and moustache, his hair combed back correctly with brilliantine: Hjalmar Schacht, former President of the Reichsbank, former Reich Minister of Economics and Plenipotentiary General for the War Economy. Directly in front of him stands a guard with a white pistol holster and white steel helmet, his hands clasped behind his back. Schacht is charged with crimes against peace by planning, preparing, launching and waging a war of aggression. He faces the death penalty. Like all his comrades, the accused has declared himself "not guilty".

The American chief prosecutor Robert H. Jackson branded Schacht responsible for mobilizing the economy for the Second World War. Ironically, the prosecutor says that the defendant, "if asked urgently, would testify to himself that he was the intelligent one.

most honorable and innocent man in the dock"¹. And further: "When we ask him why he remained a member of a criminal government, he tells us that he hoped to moderate the program by staying with it. Like a Brahmin among the untouchables, he could not bear to socialize with the Nazis, but he could never afford to separate himself from them politically," Jackson points his finger at the defendant, "Schacht was always fighting for his position in a regime he now claims to despise. When he broke with the Nazis at the fall of the regime, he did so out of tactical and by no means fundamental considerations."

Schacht takes the witness stand. The well-traveled banker is the only one of the defendants to speak in English, is often annoyed by the questions and answers in an irascible tone. An examination by the prison psychologist found that he has an intelligence quotient of 143 - the highest of all the prisoners. Schacht complains about the guards with their "grotesque bureaucratic narrow-mindedness, which surpassed the treatment I had experienced in Hitler's concentration camps"². Schacht reinterpreted his years of loyalty to the Nazi dictator in his own way: "I joined Hitler's cabinet, not with enthusiastic approval, but out of the necessity of continuing to work for the German people."³ He only wore the golden party badge of the NSDAP in order to obtain "great convenience in rail travel, obtaining automobiles, hotel rooms and the like". And Schacht brusquely brushes off the Soviet judge's repeated questions with the remark: "That has already happened here ten times."

Even before the war crimes tribunal in Nuremberg, the conspicuous character traits of Hitler's vassal Schacht came to the fore: his misjudgement of the situation, his know-it-all attitude, coupled with arrogance, a thirst for recognition and pathological ambition. The journalist Friedrich Stampfer wrote in 1948: "Only Hjalmar Schacht shines like a white lily. In this world populated by fools, whiners and scoundrels, there is only one righteous, brave and wise man. All of them have done everything badly, only one has done everything well."⁴ The lean, tall man, who never appears in public in anything other than a dark business suit, is not at all disturbed by the fact that he is a flake in the wind. On the contrary, Schacht even elevates such an approach to his lifelong strategy, as he himself writes down his motto - out of habit, as so often in poem form:

"Opportunism is strength,
To seize the moment,

If I have done something right with it, I will let myself be scolded, my character is not lasting."⁵

This includes downplaying or completely denying his early relationship with Hitler and his function as one of the most important stooges for the NSDAP's seizure of power. Even before 1933, Schacht was "one of their most helpful party supporters"⁶: the moneyed aristocrat openly advocated a Hitler government and promoted its goals. He successfully tapped the business elite for donations and opened the doors of the boardrooms to Hitler. Joseph Goebbels praised the banker for "absolutely representing our point of view. He is one of the few who consistently stand by the Führer."⁷ Schacht uses his prestige to make the Nazis acceptable abroad - and creditworthy. And he suggests to the German population: "If I, as a famous banker, am in favor of Hitler, the Nazis' choice cannot be wrong. Only later does Schacht no longer want to admit to his actions.

Hermann Josef Abs, former head of Deutsche Bank, sees Schacht as "gifted with a selective memory. He only remembered what corresponded to him and his ideas."⁸ Former State Secretary Hans Schäffer sketches the personality with all its facets: "The strong influence he was able to exert on other people, the uninhibitedness to say things that no one else dared to say, was contrasted on the other hand by a suddenness of disengagement, a change from joyful confidence to the blackest pessimism and a volatility."⁹ Schacht's companions can tell you a thing or two about this. Ulrich von Hassel judged him to be "repeatedly marred by his boundless personal ambition, combined with an unreliable character"¹⁰. The banker Max Warburg, a colleague of Schacht's, recalls their earlier collaboration with a shake of the head: "The fact that he could be wrong from time to time seemed to him to be a priori ruled out, and it was always the government that was wrong. "Schacht suffered from a boundless overestimation of his own person. He overestimated the scope of his own actions"¹¹, according to Warburg. A trait that Hitler's banker shared with the brown dictator.

Schacht himself attributes his winding path through life to his "inheritance": "You are not what you make yourself - you invisibly carry the legacy of a long chain of ancestors with you."¹² For this man in particular, there is a deeper truth in this statement. He was born on 22 January 1877 in the village of Tingleff, north of today's German-Danish border, 32 kilometers from the North Sea and 11 kilometers from the Baltic Sea. Even the name sounds strange: his father Wilhelm Schacht christened the baby Hjalmar Horace Greeley; Hjalmar at the request of his Danish grandparents, so that the little one could be called Hjalmar.

ne at least has a sensible first name. Horace Greeley stems from his father's enthusiasm for the presidential candidate of the same name in the United States. The choice is not without a certain irony: Horace Greeley changed political sides in the USA to give his career the necessary boost - just as Hjalmar Schacht changed fronts decades later. The young Hjalmar was almost born a US citizen too - only the whims of his parents prevented this.

Father William Schacht, one of seven siblings, originally wanted to become a teacher, but seized the opportunity to emigrate to America to try his luck there. The studiosus, handsome but without a fortune, falls in love with Constanze Justine Sophie Freiin von Eggers, promises to catch up with her and marry her. Constanze's parents are disturbed by the planned wedding - the marriage of their blue-blooded daughter to the bourgeois have-not is considered sacrilege. They try in vain to talk Constanze out of the liaison. When William Schacht finds a job at a German brewery in New York, Constanze follows. The two marry in January 1872 in the Episcopal Church on the corner of Madison and Fifth Avenue. William is 26 years old, his bride 21. In December 1872, Schacht accepts American citizenship.

A hard-to-digest shock for the parents-in-law. They looked down on William Schacht for the rest of their lives and had little contact with him. Son Hjalmar suffers from the rejection. For him, this "flaw" in his ancestry later becomes almost a mania: he tries to prove that he can match the noblemen, his irrepressible will to reach the top fuels his career. Thanks to his mother's genes, he actually feels like a nobleman, a von Eggers, despite his commoner's name. Throughout his life, Hjalmar will proudly recount anecdotes from the Eggers' ancestral gallery, a line that stretches back to the Middle Ages.

Hjalmar's parents are of little use to his noble ancestors in the New World. Father William struggles to make ends meet. He works for a typewriter factory and tries to open his own business - without success. Son Eddy is born. The worries increase. Constanze, plagued by homesickness, becomes pregnant again and her health deteriorates. The two decide to end their adventure in America. In the fall of 1876, they return to Germany - this time in the hope of a better life back home. William Schacht was broke, which Hjalmar tried to cover up: "He hadn't failed in America"¹³, he later tried to make sense of the situation.

Even after the birth of Hjalmar, the Schacht family of four is not much better off. Father William shuffles from job to job, from

Employer to employer. Bankruptcy becomes a constant threat, a trauma that Hjalmar tries to escape with his ambition. William first tries a job as a teacher at a private school, then as editor of the "Heider Zeitung". But the salary as a journalist is not enough, so he also works as a bookkeeper in the publisher's draper's shop. His wife Constanze earns a little extra money with a grocer's store. Suddenly, promotion beckons: William is given the position of manager of a soap factory in Husum. After a year, the company has to file for bankruptcy, the family is left empty-handed again and moves to Hamburg,

"without a penny of money", as the son notes and adds with bitterness:

"There was a lot of guilt in my father's character. When he was young, he was a man without the flesh to sit on, a wanderer with no grass growing under his soles."¹⁴The Schachts were expecting an upswing, but things got even worse in the Hanseatic city.

The family lives in Hamburg in the back of a tenement block on Eimsbütteler Chaussee, Hjalmar gets into fights with the neighbor's children. A brother, Oluf, is on the way. After many unsuccessful attempts, father William manages to find a job as an accountant at the coffee importer Schmidt-Pauli. Although the pay is barely enough to live on, he sends his eldest son Eddy to Hamburg's prominent grammar school, the Johanneum, and struggles to scrape together the money for the school fees. Then the Schmidt-Pauli company suddenly goes bankrupt and William has to look for new work, for months in vain. Finally, his father finds a job, which he keeps until his retirement - with the US insurance company Equitable Life Insurance. The greatest financial hardship seems to be over.

The Schachts move into a larger apartment in the front building, there is now enough for regularly heated rooms, carpets, a few books and oil prints on the wall, even if Hjalmar complains that "there is still no maid in the Schacht house"¹⁵. At the age of nine, the junior is also allowed to transfer to the Johanneum, "a school for scholars that is famous throughout Germany", as he proudly notes. The joy is quickly dampened by the recognizable social differences at the school, the poorly dressed suburban child contrasts with the smart patrician sons from Uhlenhorst. "I suffered from the fact that we didn't live up to our status," reports Hjalmar, "although I was one of the better pupils, it didn't change the fact that I was left out." The junior became painfully aware of this when he wished for his first pair of long pants, just like all his classmates were wearing. His father bought him a pair of "rough-haired, felty, thick and shapeless" trousers made of English fabric, which caused laughter among the pupils, "a big shock for me", says Hjalmar, which "hurt my self-esteem for a long time". The boy isolates himself

The sons of the 'better' classes were members of the prestigious rowing and sailing clubs on the Outer Alster, on the other side of the Lombard Bridge. They owned their own boats, took dancing lessons, wore tails early on and traveled with their parents to Switzerland, Italy or Norway in the summer. The other students had no part in this wonderful world." Even for his A-levels, the student had to borrow his ex- amens tailcoat from a comrade. In his professional life, Hjalmar Schacht did everything he could to make up for this shortcoming, build up a considerable fortune for himself and become one of those at the top. He makes elegant clothing, a coat with fur, tailcoat, stand-up collar, English shoes and a cigar his trademark.

Hjalmar's parents move to Berlin before he finishes school, so the student moves in with a doctor friend. There he experiences his first - platonic - love with the daughter of the house. He writes her pages of verse. To no avail: "The mean girl didn't take me seriously and laughed at my poems." Worse still, when Hjalmar is sitting on the toilet in the courtyard, the young lady locks him up. This insult was too much for the young man - he moved out immediately. After leaving school in 1895, he followed his brother Eddy to Kiel University to study medicine. When he left grammar school in Hamburg, Hjalmar already seemed to have developed traits such as ambition and a know-it-all attitude; his teachers wrote on his leaving certificate: "Thinks he is destined for higher things."¹⁶ The student did not know what career he would later pursue and was undecided about his choice of subjects - in four and a half years, he enrolled at five different universities, including Berlin, Paris, Munich and Leipzig in addition to Kiel. His courses of study also differed greatly: medicine, German studies, literary history, journalism, rhetoric, French, sociology and economics. In the end, he stayed with economics for the last few semesters and completed his university career with a doctoral thesis entitled "The Theoretical Content of English Mercantilism".

These stages sound like the life of a good-for-nothing. In fact, Hjalmar Schacht tried to break out of his studies and take on a practical job: The 19-year-old signed on as a trainee at the "Kleines Journal" in Berlin, a job his father had arranged for him. As a work sample, the graduate apprentice submitted his own poem to the local editor, which was printed in the "Wiener Dichterheim". Schacht conceals the fact that he had to pay five marks for the publication - the "Wiener Dichterheim" bases its business on the vanity of would-be authors. The young poet also sends the issue of "Dichterheim" to all his friends and relatives.

relatives. Schacht's first article in the "Kleines Journal" is not very successful. He is asked to write a twelve-line article about a bridge construction, and the editor praises it: "Not bad at all for a beginner. Quite a nice little report." But in the end, "there wasn't a single word of mine in it," Schacht remarks in frustration. His guest appearance was only to last a few months.

Schacht finds his first job after graduation thanks to a newspaper advertisement. He applies to the "Central Office for the Preparation of Trade Contracts", an association of exporters and bankers. Schacht attends an evening interview with other candidates and is accepted with a monthly salary of 100 marks and a surprising greeting from the managing director: "You are the only person who has come to this evening in a tux. I love it when my gentlemen take pride in themselves and represent themselves to the outside world."¹⁷ Schacht writes essays and articles, appears as a speaker and works his way up to become chief publicity officer. He is ready for his next career leap. And he was soon to embark on it: The young man accepts a lucrative position as press spokesman at Dresdner Bank for 8,800 marks a year - more than an authorized signatory earns. This secured his further advancement and a life of prosperity was on the horizon.

The First World War throws Schacht off his usual working path: as he is unfit for deployment at the front due to his visual impairment, the army sends him from Dresdner Bank to a banking department of the German military government in Belgium. The civilian helps to collect money that Belgium has to pay to the occupying forces. An emergency currency is created by the Germans, backed by a loan. When the German military department issues the currency, Schacht arranges a shady deal: he allocates a batch of these Belgian banknotes to the Dresdner Bank, which are listed below their real value - a sure profit for Schacht's employer when they are resold. When the army superior learns of the transaction, he accuses Schacht of having exploited the position of trust for unauthorized manipulation. Schacht is fired. It is precisely this kind of cheating, which now costs Schacht his job, that Hitler later particularly appreciates: the banker is "an incredibly intelligent person when it comes to cheating", says the dictator, "because of his greatness in swindling other people" he was indispensable, his "sleight of hand" had shown "that an intelligent Aryan could be superior to the Jew in this field too"⁽¹⁸⁾.

The civilian returns to Dresdner Bank in 1916, where the next disaster awaits: after the Brussels affair causes a stir in banking circles, the prestigious financial institution no longer wants to have anything to do with its employee.

and he is advised to leave. Schacht later glossed over this second ejection by claiming that he had resigned because he saw no possibility of being promoted to the board of Dresdner Bank. His next stop was the small National Bank, which was renamed Danat Bank after the merger with Darmstädter Bank. Schacht worked there alongside the co-managing director and successful stock market speculator Jakob Goldschmidt. It soon becomes apparent that Goldschmidt has the greater benevolence of the supervisory board, lands the better deals and is more skillful than his colleague at putting himself in the limelight. The friction between the two increases, they argue loudly in the offices - to the amusement of the employees. Schacht realizes that a position as number one at Danat Bank is out of the question. He is back at a dead end.

And then there is another problem: women. This starts when he devotes himself to a previously neglected topic at the beginning of his banking career: Marriage. He has long known the right candidate: his childhood friend Luise Sowa. As a 19-year-old student, he was already playing tennis with the girl, who was two years older than him, in Berlin. Luise, dark-haired, petite and lively, is the daughter of a police commissioner and lives next door to Schacht's parents. The two use solitary walks along the Schlachtensee to get to know each other. After just one year, the lovers make plans to marry. But Schacht doesn't think about keeping his vows so quickly - he prefers to study in Paris for six months and leave his beloved in Berlin. After his return home, it's all over, he leaves Luise and continues to work on his career.

Only after five years of separation, in the fall of 1902, did Schacht resume contact with Luise. They put the wedding rings on each other's fingers in January 1903, six years after their engagement. Schacht is 26 years old. The impulse to marry seems to have suddenly swept through the banker, probably driven by the consideration that having a woman at his side would improve his career prospects at Dresdner Bank more than being a single man - a rational decision in those days of strict social conventions. In any case, the marriage is not under a good star from the outset.

The husband has little time for their life together. He leaves the Berlin apartment early in the morning, takes the bus to the bank and returns late in the evening. After a quick dinner, Schacht sits down at his desk and works late into the night on articles and book contributions. The wife goes to bed alone. The more the banker climbs up the career ladder, the more he throws himself into his job: meetings away from home, longer trips abroad, meetings with friends from his Masonic lodge,

Many things are more important than Luise. "I don't think I was an easy husband," Schacht later admits, "leading a bourgeois life wasn't in my nature. Back then, I was always on the go, always doing something new, always busy with my own ideas."¹⁹The birth of their two children, Inge and Jens Hjalmar, did nothing to change this.

It soon becomes apparent that the two different personalities do not get on particularly well. Love, if it ever provided the fuel for the relationship, quickly cools. Hjalmar Schacht does not make it easy for his wife: his bossy, quick-tempered nature, his bossiness and his urge to lecture do not end after he leaves the office. Schacht's character is almost unbearable for many of his subordinates - and his wife Luise also has a hard time, especially with her husband's reticence: "Words of love are rare, feelings are more hidden than shown," Schacht describes himself, "I have always been described in public as a hard, unfeeling person. I regret this impression, but I can't change it."²⁰Schacht criticized his wife: "Luise had inherited her father's Prussian officialdom, which can sometimes turn into pedantry." From year to year, the two became more and more estranged. This may have been helped by the fact that, according to reports from contemporaries, the banker did not take the marriage vow very seriously and liked to have fun with other ladies on his business trips. The drifting apart of the partners soon became obvious to outsiders: During his stay in Brussels during the First World War, Schacht leaves the family behind in Berlin. In 1923, they separated for the first time for an extended period: the husband sent his wife and children to Lausanne in Switzerland, where their son Jens went to school and their daughter Inge enrolled at the local university.

The inner distance between her husband and Luise is exacerbated by Schacht's political ambitions. Actually, the banking business is not primarily a political business. But Schacht found a taste for his own economic policy essays and public relations work for the public. He himself dates his vocation for politics back to 1888, when, as an eleven-year-old onlooker, he watched the ceremony for the inauguration of Hamburg's free port by the young Kaiser Wilhelm II - six months before a certain Adolf Schicklgruber, alias Hitler, was born in Braunau am Inn. After the speeches, the Kaiser steps forward, decked out in his gala uniform, has a hammer handed to him and strikes the symbolic last stone of the bridge tower three times. He then steps with dignity into his four-horse carriage and disappears again. "Since that day

I've seen the world with different eyes. There's a big difference between hearing about an emperor and seeing him in the flesh," says Schacht, "Power is an empty word until you have witnessed a spectacle of power. The meaning of the word politics became clear to me."²¹

This fascination never let go of the man for the rest of his life and led him straight into the arms of Adolf Hitler. Until then, Schacht's convictions were to turn 180 degrees, as his first direct appearance in the political arena led him in a left-liberal direction. Together with a number of national liberal politicians and Theodor Wolff, editor-in-chief of the "Berliner Tageblatt", he founded the German Democratic Party (DDP) in November 1918. Even in its founding appeal, the new group rejected the monarchists and right-wing radicals and described itself as democratic and republican. The DDP got off to a successful start: Just two months later, in January 1919, the party won 74 seats in the election to the National Assembly.

As early as the 1st Congress of the German Democratic Party in Berlin in July 1919, Schacht distinguished himself with radical demands: he considered the partial expropriation of war profiteers, a wealth tax on the wealthy and high taxation of large incomes to be an "absolute necessity"²². These are left-wing theses that could also come from the SPD. In fact, the Social Democrats and the DDP were the only two parties to unconditionally support the Weimar Republic - until Schacht later aided the National Socialists in the elimination of this very republic as its gravedigger. Schacht promoted the DDP through lectures and speeches and worked on the party's main executive committee - until 1923. This year brought drastic changes for him and was to change the course of his life. His opportunities for advancement at Danat Bank were halted by his enterprising colleague Goldschmidt, who was considered the clear number one internally. Schacht therefore looked for another career opportunity and made use of his friendship with Chancellor Gustav Stresemann. He still knew him from his time as an assistant at the Handelsvertragsverein. At the time, Stresemann worked as a legal adviser to the Association of Saxon Industrialists, and the organization was represented by the Trade Association in foreign trade matters. The two remained in contact over the years.

When Stresemann became head of government, Schacht saw the door open for a career change. In August 1923, he wrote to the Chancellor and recommended himself for the civil service. But in October 1923, Stresemann's first cabinet fails. When the new government is formed, Stresemann plans to appoint his banker friend as Reich Finance Minister. But the German National People's Party vetoed his appointment; Schacht was politically too left-wing for them. Schacht

does not give up, however, and fights in the background for a position in accordance with his motto:

"No noble herb grows against
violence and cunning. If you don't
want to succumb to them,
You must fight them with the same weapons."²³

The method is successful. Stresemann manages to get the banker appointed to the influential post of Reich Currency Commissioner. Schacht was able to take up his post on November 13; a few days earlier, Adolf Hitler had failed in his attempted coup against the government in Munich and was now in prison in Landsberg awaiting trial. Schacht only informs his wife Luise in Switzerland about his new task afterwards. The Reichswährungskommissar is a post created by the government specifically to defeat inflation. Since 1920, Germany has been suffering from an accelerating rise in prices: after the war, one gold mark was worth two pa- piermarks. In November 1923, one gold mark cost one trillion paper marks. The devaluation of money impoverishes many workers, employees and middle-class people who have no backing in tangible assets such as houses or land. The political climate is poisoned. The government draws up a plan to stop inflation: instead of the old paper mark, the Rentenmark is introduced as the new transitional currency, which is backed by the state's land holdings. And Hjalmar Schacht is the man who is to oversee the implementation of the plans - which is paradoxical in that the banker originally opposed this form of Rentenmark. He insisted that the money should be backed by gold. But in the end, his job was more important to him. On November 15, 1923, the printing presses are stopped and the era of the Rentenmark begins, which leads to a complete standstill of inflation within a few months. Even though others provided the blueprint for combating the devaluation of money, Schacht was later celebrated as the "savior of the mark".

His office is at the hierarchical level of an advisor in the Ministry of Finance and reports directly to the Minister. The Reichswährungskommissar has the right to attend cabinet meetings in an advisory capacity. Schacht thus sits in the coveted position in the civil service. The job seems easier than expected; his secretary Clara Steffek answers questions from journalists: "What did he do? He sat in his chair and smoked cigars in the dark room of the Ministry of Finance, where it smelled of old cleaning rags. Read letters? No, he didn't read letters. Wrote letters? No, he didn't write letters. He made a lot of phone calls in all directions and to all German and international offices that had to do with money and foreign currency. He also smoked."²⁴ On November 20

In 1923, one week after taking up his post, Rudolf von Havenstein, the previous President of the Reichsbank, dies suddenly. On this day, the official exchange rate for the dollar is set at 4.2 trillion marks, or 4.2 marks for bonds or gold - the signal to the markets that inflation has been eliminated. The Reichswährungskommissar immediately sees the opportunity of a lifetime: to succeed Havenstein as head of the Reichsbank. This powerful office would be the crowning glory of any banker's life. The head of the supreme monetary authority is appointed for life by the President of the Reich. Once in the post, nothing and nobody can touch the President of the Reichsbank, as he is not bound by instructions from the government. He can therefore play God a little. What's more, the prestige of this office can hardly be increased: Among the population, the Reichsbank President is seen as a guarantor of the stability of the Mark and thus of the economic recovery that everyone is longing for after the lost world war. Abroad, the Chief Supervisor is an important point of contact for ministers and diplomats.

Schacht urges Stresemann to appoint him president of the Reichsbank. But his friend cannot help him for the time being: The Chancellor falls on November 23rd following a vote of no confidence by the SPD. The new head of government, Center Party politician Wilhelm Marx, does not have a clear majority in parliament. When Schacht's ambitions become known, there is massive resistance. Marx and large sections of the governing parties favored the right-wing Karl Helfferich as the candidate for Reichsbank President. The professor wrote "Das Geld", a standard work on monetary policy, worked as a director at Deutsche Bank before the war and was active in politics for many years.

Schacht's opponents cite his Brussels affair with the foreign exchange dealings. It showed a lack of personal integrity on the part of the candidate; only people of impeccable moral character could sit at the president's desk. In December 1923, the Cologne banker Alfred von Oppenheim declared to the central committee of the Reichsbank that he considered himself legitimized "to declare quite openly on behalf of the occupied territory, and not only on behalf of the banks, but also on behalf of industry and commerce, that Mr Schacht did not enjoy the reputation in the occupied territory that a Reichsbank president should have in their opinion"²⁵.

The Schacht defense front was also joined by the leading men of the Reichsbank: In a report dated December 4, the Board of Directors unanimously proposes Helfferich as the new head; the Reichsbank's Central Committee, which consists largely of bankers, also agrees with the Board of Directors' vote for Helfferich. Schacht thus appears to be out of the running.

The decision is scheduled for December 13, 1923 in the Reichsrat, the council of states that has the right to nominate the Reichsbank President - a pro forma event. However, the representative of Social Democrat-ruled Prussia demands a postponement: This was because Stresemann had confidentially informed him via an intermediary that Helfferich was unacceptable for foreign policy reasons. Prussia therefore proposed Schacht as a candidate. This torpedo from Stresemann's banker friend hits home: the vote is postponed and a further expert opinion from the Reichsbank is requested.

The requested expert opinion arrives on December 17 and is devastating:

"After careful consideration, we have unanimously come to the conclusion that the currency commissioner Dr. Schacht is in no way suitable for the post of Reichsbank president."²⁶The Board of Directors considers Schacht to be a person of too little integrity and therefore unacceptable to the population, the banking world and the officials of the Reichsbank. The Monetary Commissioner had also had nothing to do with the operation of a central bank and had falsely portrayed himself in his function as the father of the Rentenmark. For this reason, at the end of the report, the Board of Directors once again voted unanimously in favor of Helfferich. The Central Committee of the Reichsbank also rejects Schacht by 23 votes to 3. Once again, Schacht failed. However, the Prussian SPD government continued to support its candidate, forcing the government to issue a statement. The government is exasperated and now recommends Schacht for the post instead of its favorite Helfferich. The decision was made: On December 22, 1923, the Social Democratic Reich President Friedrich Ebert appoints the 46-year-old Hjalmar Schacht as Reichsbank President for life - the left-wing liberal SPD candidate is elevated to the post against the combined resistance of the banking world, big business and the right-wing camp.

Schacht enjoyed his role in the following years. He knew how to present himself on the public stage and get his name in the newspapers. As a prominent figure, he could lead an uplifting life of prosperity until his retirement - since 1926 he has resided privately on his Gühlen estate, 70 kilometers north of Berlin. Nothing can cloud this career. Or could it?

In February 1929, Schacht traveled to Paris as head of the German delegation to renegotiate reparations and war debts. After the chairman, the American Owen Young, the plan became known as the Young Plan. The President of the Reichsbank himself helped to launch this initiative. However, the poker game for money and loans, foreign policy and Germany's place in the world did not go as Schacht had expected with his arrogant and demanding negotiating tactics. It is becoming apparent that substantial payments will also be due in the future. Schacht will

He fears that he will be pilloried as the person responsible, just as the signatories of the Versailles Peace Treaty once were. The Huguenot press and Hitler's NSDAP are already firing from all cylinders at home against the alleged treason. Schacht therefore turns - once again - and initiates his switch from supporter to opponent of the Young Plan. He tries to portray the Reich government as the culprit: He launches comments in the press, publishes a statement with maximum demands, such as the return of the German colonies, sets it up for the failure of the conference. In December 1929 - the global economic crisis cast its shadow in the wake of the stock market crash on Wall Street - the smouldering conflict escalated: Schacht publicly criticized the government's allegedly wrong policy on the Young Plan and tried to absolve himself of all blame. The National Socialists applaud enthusiastically - they could not have wished for a better key witness for their campaign against the Young Plan than the reputable Reichsbank president. The "Vossische Zeitung" rightly stated on December 21, 1929: "Schacht as the godfather of a campaign in which Hitler is the big winner for Hugenberg's money!"²⁷

Schacht had thus joined the right-wing camp, a process that began when he left the German Democratic Party in 1926. He confessed that he was "declaring open war on the old system" with his actions. In January 1930, probably overestimating himself and his importance, he tried to boycott negotiations on the acceptance of reparations - "this is the hour of my life", he believed. Schacht was right, but in a different way than he thought: his attempts to agitate against the government's foreign policy came to nothing, and in January the finance minister suggested that he resign. It was not until March 7, 1930 that Schacht took the bitter step - the dream of the job of a lifetime was over.

For the former Reichsbank president, it is clear that his affront to the government means that a career under left-wing or liberal auspices is out of the question. Only one direction remained: the radical right. Hans Luther, finance minister and superior of the former Reich currency commissioner and successor to the office of Reichsbank president, attested to Schacht's "innate sense of a coming change in the political weather and his willingness to exploit such things for his own benefit."²⁸ With his sense of populism, Schacht focused on the National Socialists, the only force he believed had what it took to take power. He was thus one of the few prominent figures in the business world to back the leader Hitler early on, long before the NSDAP's first electoral successes. As early as November 1929, Schacht made his first positive public statement about the Nazis

about the Nazis for the first time: "The sympathetic thing about the Hitlerites is their unpretentious national feeling," said the head of the Reichsbank, "there is a lot of idealism in their circle." At the beginning of 1930, it was clear to everyone how his game of "change the tree" would end. Bella Fromm, society columnist for the "Vossische Zeitung", wrote on February 12, 1930:

"Silver wedding at the home of a major banker: overly ostentatious. Many celebrities had been induced to attend because they had been promised that other celebrities would also be present. Reichsbank President Schacht present with his wife. She adorned her bosom, or rather, made it stand out even more with a precious swastika in diamonds and diamonds, provided that this seemed politically or socially opportune. Although Schacht owes his present high position to patrons such as Professor George Bernhard, the editor-in-chief of the Vossische Zeitung, banker Jakob Goldschmidt and other non-Aryans, he does not disdain to make the swastika his symbol if he believes that it can serve his purposes. Tonight he said to me: 'Why not give the National Socialists a chance? They seem pretty dashing to me.'"²⁹

In September 1930, Schacht set off on a trip to America, during which he made over 40 public statements on the political situation in lectures and in front of the press, and was already eagerly engaged in subliminal advertising for the Nazis. Hitler had found the ideal protagonist from the camp of economists for his movement: Schacht is a national and international celebrity, a recognized expert on economic and monetary issues, who distinguishes himself with his opinions as an independent thinker, seemingly only committed to the common good. As Schacht did not belong to any party at the time, his comments sounded particularly credible as an "impartial" person. The German electorate of apolitical voters, who shunned the bickering of the parties and wanted nothing to do with politics, were particularly drawn to such a National Socialist billboard like a magnet. If such an *intégré*, independent authority votes for Hitler, then the Nazis must be all right - right?

Schacht reads Hitler's "Mein Kampf" on his trip. He does not hide his opinion in the United States: Hitler's success in the elections for the Reichstag on September 14, 1930 "was a protest vote against the Versailles Treaty and not against the Jews, who prevented him from winning the election"³⁰. A nice trivialization of the actual situation, just like his other assessment of the situation: "The conditions in Germany are not at all worrying," said Schacht, "once the German people are starving, there will be many more Hitlers." The use of words in his lectures, which are almost identical to the theses of Gottfried Fe-

ders, the dominant Nazi economic theorist, to "break the bondage to interest": "The debt dependency in which Germany finds itself is accompanied by a bondage to interest that exceeds every economically and morally tolerable measure"³¹, explains Schacht.

His rapprochement with the Nazis took on concrete forms in December 1930: At a dinner given by his friend Emil Georg von Stauss, board member of Deutsche Bank and Hitler admirer, he meets Hermann Göring. The three of them chat animatedly about the economic situation, the problem of rising unemployment and Germany's lame foreign policy. Flattered, the banker accepts Göring's invitation to dinner. When the "Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung" asked the question in its 1930 Christmas survey: "What do you think about Hitler joining the government?", Schacht replied that it was

"not possible" to govern against the "strong extreme right"³².

At the meeting in Göring's apartment in Berlin-Wilmersdorf on January 5, 1931, Schacht was joined by Karin Göring, Fritz Thyssen and Joseph Goebbels. The visitor notes about the apartment: "well furnished in a bourgeois style, but not excessively so, comfortable and with good taste"³³. Hitler has announced his arrival - an opportunity for Schacht to get to know him better. The host serves a yellow pea soup with bacon. After the meal, Karin Göring, suffering from a heart condition, lies on a divan and quietly listens to the conversations at the table. Schacht describes her first encounter with the Nazi dictator as follows:

"Hitler appeared after the meal. He wore dark trousers and the traditional brown and yellow uniform jacket of the party. His appearance was neither pretentious nor sought-after - on the contrary, it was natural and modest. He did not let on in any way that he was already the leader of the second largest German party in the Reichstag. Our conversation very quickly turned to political and economic problems. At this first meeting I learned what we all learned later, that only 5 percent of a conversation with Hitler consisted of what his partners said. Hitler conducted 95 percent of the conversation alone. The skill of his speech was striking. He spoke with moderation and was visibly at pains to avoid anything that might shock us as representatives of a traditional world."

Schacht was immediately fascinated by Hitler as a person: "What impressed me was this man's absolute conviction of the correctness of his views and his determination to put these views into practice." Over the following weeks, the convert approached business friends, managers, politicians and the Reich Chancellor in order to convince the elite of the need for a

government coalition with the National Socialists. An official Nazi biography later describes his achievements as follows: "Through advice and action and by using his personality with the circles and people over whom he has influence, Schacht from now on became a conscious helper of the National Socialist movement and one who played a valuable part in its eventual victory."³⁴It is striking that Schacht did not join the NSDAP for a long time despite his enthusiasm for the Nazis. There were mundane reasons for this: He asks Hitler whether he would like to become a party member; the NSDAP chairman is against it - he sees a non-party-affiliated expert as being of greater benefit to his movement. Only when he was awarded the golden party badge in 1937 for "old fighters" did he allow himself to be accepted, receiving the party number 3805230 - facts that he later denied in the war crimes trial. He donated 1,000 marks a year to the party, not a large sum for the well-known miser. By contrast, his later successes in obtaining large sums of money from other entrepreneurs to enable Hitler's rise were enormous.

Schacht would probably have changed fronts again if he had thought he had a better chance of becoming president of the Reichsbank again. He raises the subject in talks with Chancellor Heinrich Brüning; Schacht later admits that he was expecting a corresponding offer.³⁵But the Chancellor has no intention of helping the turncoat back to his old job. In retrospect, Brüning is convinced "that Mr. Schacht would have dropped Mr. Hitler immediately in 1931 and '32 if he had been offered the Reichsbank presidency"³⁶.

In the absence of alternatives, Schacht clings all the more closely to his hopeful Hitler. In the years leading up to the takeover, the former bank president became the Nazi dictator's most important economic advisor - he provided information from the circles of entrepreneurs and managers, gave advice for the election campaign and the party programme, formulated programmatic essays, organized confidential circles and brought wealthy entrepreneurs together with the NSDAP leader. While Schacht had previously been more active in the background, he entered the public stage with Hitler for the first time on October 11, 1931.

The occasion was a rally of right-wing organizations in the spa town of Bad Harzburg, with paramilitary organizations marching past, with imperial flags and a flood of right-wing slogans. The meeting is a declaration of war on the existing government and on democracy in general, later known as the Harzburg Front. The usual right-wing radicals speak: Alfred Hugenberg and Adolf Hitler. The real sensation for the media, however, is Schacht's appearance alongside the NSDAP chairman. The prominent banker gave the main speech on the economic situation. In it, he attacks the government.

Brüning's government unusually harshly, accusing it of incompetence and immorality and stirring up resentment by claiming that Germany's debts were higher than expected and that the country was facing bankruptcy. His crisis propaganda concludes with the appeal "that the national education process, which has taken such a tremendous upswing in recent years thanks to determined leaders, must be led to victory", and with the exclamation, entirely in Hitler's diction: "That is why I wish with a fervent heart that this national storm wind that is sweeping through Germany may not tire!"³⁷ The public reacted with horror to Schacht's outbursts. The press spoke of

"derailment" and "declaration of war", Communist members of the Reichstag demanded an indictment for high treason, albeit in vain.

Schacht's advice to the NSDAP had an effect: Hitler realized that he needed better contacts with German business leaders if he wanted to make his party suitable for Germany's economic elite - and collect more donations. To this end, the Nazi leader wanted a circle of advisors from all areas of the economy. In December 1931, he commissioned Wilhelm Keppler to organize a group of personalities - on one condition: Hjalmar Schacht must be on board. This committee became known as the Keppler Circle, later known as the Himmler Circle of Friends because of its new patron. Keppler had been a member of the NSDAP since 1927 and was the director of *Odinwerke* in Eberbach, Baden, a factory producing photographic gelatine in which the American company Eastman-Kodak had a stake.

During the first half of 1932, he recruited around a dozen men from industry and the financial world. The meetings were informal and the circle of participants was constantly changing. The advisory committee hoped to influence National Socialist economic policy and dissuade Hitler from fatal socialist nationalization theories. Keppler's activities are a pain in Schacht's stomach: he is jealous because Hitler has chosen the largely unknown factory director and not the famous ex-Reichsbank president. Schacht therefore organized his own advisory office as a rival event. In March 1932, he approached Paul Reusch, General Director of *Gutehoffnungshütte*, and asked for support for his planned "Schacht Work Center". The National Socialists could no longer be avoided, he said, but had to work more closely with them. Schacht's proposal: "Initially, I would like to employ a gentleman who is exceptionally well-versed in financial and economic policy and who I have tried and tested for about two years in order to establish contact with Hitler's economic policy organizations through him and to work through and shape the problems with the gentlemen in such a way that they result in a

economic policy program for the National Socialist Party, which industry and commerce can support."³⁸It is also about money: "I calculate the costs to be extremely low at 12,000 marks a year for the gentleman to be engaged and about 3,000 marks a year for expenses. That would be 15,000 marks per year, which would probably have to be secured for two years. I myself am prepared to contribute a tenth of the financing costs." Reusch reacted enthusiastically and, together with other industrialists, raised the required sum. Karl Krämer, an employee of the Hamburg Institute of International Economics, was engaged for the job. This "Arbeitsstelle Schacht" worked in parallel with the Keppler Circle. Keppler criticizes this: "His committee is by no means ideal; he obviously paid less attention to the heads than to the name and the purse," says the Nazi advisor, "Obviously, Dr. Schacht intends to continue working independently in the way he has begun, and he named as members of his circle Messrs. Vogler, Flick, Reusch, Springorum, von Stauss and von Wihnowsky, as well as a gentleman from the lignite industry, apparently Mr. Silverberg."³⁹Within a short space of time, Schacht had won over the first guard of German industrialists for his project - a reflection of the fact that the cream of German business was moving closer to the NSDAP. Nevertheless, Schacht's extra tours at the Nazi headquarters did not achieve the applause he had hoped for: when Hitler admonished the former Reichsbank president to cooperate more, Schacht dropped out and downgraded his liaison office to an appendage of the Keppler circle.

In mid-May 1932, Hitler invites the entrepreneurs and managers of the advisory circle to a confidential meeting at his Berlin residence, the Kaiserhof Hotel. The NSDAP leader thanked them for their support and declared that he would soon take over the government in Germany. He therefore needed the backing of men of business: "I am a politician, not an economist. I rely on your better knowledge and your great experience." After taking power, he would no longer tolerate trade unions and, if possible, no political parties. Those present are thrilled by the Nazi leader's preferential treatment, which gives them hope for the future. After the speech, Schacht addresses short words of praise and thanks to Hitler.

In consultation with the NSDAP leader, the former head of the Reichsbank takes up the pen and writes down the "Principles of German Economic Policy"⁴⁰, which is distributed in a print run of 30,000 copies before the Reichstag elections in July 1932. It is astonishing how comprehensively the intelligent formulator Schacht adopts the dull terminology of the Nazis in his pamphlet, calling for "first the nation, then the economy", in line with Hitler's ideas of the primacy of the people's body over the economy. Schacht sees the success of capitalism "only through education in religious and national sentiment, which the

The good of the whole over the benefit of the individual". New countries should be opened up to boost the economy and competition from neighbors should be countered "by means of a strong will to defend and a determined will to defend". The author writes: "But not only in Germany, but also in the rest of the world, people have realized that there are national vital rights that are inalienable. The victory of these vital rights of the German people can no longer be stopped."

Schacht thus established himself as Hitler's most important whisperer on economic issues. In the following months, the Nazi supporter intensified his efforts to influence the brown movement. He succeeded in persuading the NSDAP chairman to have an unpopular economic brochure scrapped. Schacht met regularly with Hitler, sending submissive letters in which he was not stingy with advice: "Perhaps I can say one thing as an economist: if possible, don't bring out a detailed economic program. There is no such thing that 14 million people could agree on. Economic policy is not a party-building force, at best it gathers interested parties."⁴¹ The letter concludes with the words: "You can count on me as your reliable helper. With a hearty salute."

This is not just an empty phrase, but Schacht is taking further action to get his future employer into government. He regularly works with his friends in banks and industry. His appointments with Reich Chancellor Franz von Papen, Brüning's successor, show just how attractive his name is. After the NSDAP's electoral successes, the former Reichsbank president became very vocal and demanded the chancellor's resignation in favor of the Nazi dictator: "Hitler, that's a very intelligent man," Schacht said to Papen, "give him your position. Hitler is the only man who can save Germany."⁴² Shortly after the election of November 6, 1932, in which the NSDAP lost votes, Schacht and Heinrich Himmler went back to Papen to discuss further tactics. In view of the results, it seemed increasingly unlikely that Hitler would win the election on his own and be swept into the Reich Chancellery. Nevertheless, Schacht encouraged his idol: "There is no doubt in my mind that the course of events can only have one end, and that is your chancellorship. It seems that our attempt to get a number of signatures from the business community for this is not entirely in vain after all."⁴³

The signature campaign mentioned above is Schacht's most consistent attempt to remove the barriers to Hitler's chancellorship. One person in particular was adamantly opposed to the "Bohemian corporal": Reich President Paul von Hindenburg. These reservations had to be overcome. And

What could be more effective than a request from the business community to the head of state to finally promote the Nazi leader? On November 19, 1932, the money managers and industrialists sent a petition to Hindenburg. Schacht is the first to sign the letter. A further 18 people, including Kurt Frei- herr von Schröder, Eberhard Graf von Kalckreuth, Emil Helfferich and Fritz Thyssen, also sign the following document:

"... The outcome of the Reichstag election of November 6 of this year has shown that the present cabinet, whose upright will no one in the German people doubts, has not found sufficient support among the German people for the path it has chosen. Not only the German National People's Party and the smaller groups close to it, but also the National Socialist German Workers' Party are fundamentally opposed to the previous parliamentary party regime and have thus affirmed Your Excellency's goal. The transfer to the leader of the largest national group of the responsible leadership of a presidential cabinet equipped with the best professional and personal forces will eradicate the dross and errors that inevitably cling to every mass movement and will sweep millions of people who today stand apart into affirmative strength ..."⁴⁴

The document not only calls for Hitler to take responsibility for the government, it also reflects the anti-democratic attitude of the signatories, who no longer have anything to do with parliamentarianism. It remains unclear to what extent this petition contributed to Hindenburg actually offering Hitler the chancellorship a few weeks later. In any case, on January 30, 1933, the time had come: Hitler was Reich Chancellor. Schacht has reached his goal. He has backed the right person. New, prestigious offices are assured for him.

Immediately after taking power, Hitler dissolves the Reichstag and calls new elections. The purpose: to secure the dictatorship of the NDSAP. The final election campaign begins, the most elaborate and expensive material battle to date. To ensure that Nazi rule does not fail at the last moment due to a lack of money for propaganda, Schacht lands his biggest coup: tapping his friends from the business world in favor of the Nazi election campaign.

On February 20, 1933, Hermann Göring invites prominent industrialists to his official residence in Berlin. In the late afternoon, several dozen business magnates arrive - a who's who of the German elite, including Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach, Albert Vogler, Fritz Springorum, Ernst Tengelmann, Ernst Brandi, Karl Büren, Georg von Schnitzler, Hugo Stinnes jr, Fritz von Opel, Ludwig von Winterfeld, Günther Quandt and August Diehn. Hjalmar Schacht is already present. This brings together all the important industries, from mining, steel and automobiles to IG Farben and Siemens. Göring arrives a quarter of an hour late - an unheard-of event for the assembled industrialists.

A while later, Hitler appears, shakes everyone's hand personally and launches into an hour and a half speech. The Reich Chancellor rejects economic experiments and emphasizes the advantages of private property and inheritance law. He warns of the communist danger, which he wants to eradicate with the new elections. This would be a fight to the death. At the end of the monologue, Krupp spontaneously expresses his "sincere thanks" to all those involved - this shows how quickly the businessman is on his knees before the new rulers. Four weeks earlier, he had still been negative towards the Nazi leader. Hitler disappears again, Göring speaks instead. The Reichstag President explains to the guests that the financial resources of the NSDAP, the SS and the SA are exhausted. Help was needed. Others would now have to make financial sacrifices. This would be all the easier with the realization "that the election on

March 5 would be the last in 10 years, but probably in 100 years". Now Göring is also stepping down.

Then Hjalmar Schacht makes his grand entrance. It is a smear theater, arranged with the Nazi rulers. Schacht explains to the stunned audience that the economy's hour of destiny has come. He doesn't want to make a big deal of it: "And now, gentlemen, to the cash register!" the Hitler paladin shouts cheerfully to the audience. His demand is a tough one: the economists should pledge three million marks in election campaign donations on the spot. Conveniently, Schacht has even prepared the distribution of the sum:

1,000,000 marks western coal and iron industry 1,000,000 marks

chemical industry and potash mining 1,000,000 marks lignite,

mechanical and electrical engineering

The representatives of the coal and iron companies immediately pledged their million marks, sharing the sum in a ratio of 60 to 40. The potash mining industry gave 500,000 marks, with the chemical industry taking the other half. For the third group, Schacht presents the allocation key: lignite 500,000 Marks Automotive industry 100,000 Marks Mechanical engineering 100,000 marks

Electrical engineering 300,000 Marks, of which Siemens 100,000 Marks⁴⁵

Schacht presents himself as the future contact point. He takes over the administration of the funds, paying himself as an exception. For this purpose, he sets up an account with the bank Delbrück, Schickler & Co. under the name "Nationale Treuhand, Dr. Hjalmar Schacht". The account shows the following deposits:

"February:

23. Association for Mining Interests, Essen	200000 Marks
24. Karl Hermann	150000 Marks
Automobile Exhibition, Berlin	100000 Marks
25. Dir. A. Steinke DEMAG	200000 Marks
AG, Duisburg	50000 Marks
27. Telefunken, company for wireless	
telegraphy, Berlin	35000 Marks
Osram GmbH	40000 Marks
28. IG Farben, Frankfurt/M.	400000 Marks
<u>March:</u>	
1. Your deposit (shaft)	125000 Marks
3. Dir. Karl Lange, machine industry	50000 Marks
Association for Mining Interests, Essen	100000 Marks
Karl Hermann, Berlin	150000 Marks
AEG, Berlin	60000 Marks
7. Gen.-Dir. F. Springorum, Dortmund	36000 Marks
Accumulatorenfabrik AG, Berlin	25000 Marks
13. Association for Mining Interests, Essen	300000 Marks" ⁴⁶

The millions paved the way for the Nazi dictatorship. Goebbels notes enthusiastically on February 20, 1933: "We are raising a very large sum for the election, which will relieve us of all financial worries in one fell swoop. I immediately alert the entire party apparatus and an hour later the presses are already rattling. Now we're going to rev up to full speed. If no more extraordinary mishaps occur, then we will have won all along the line."⁴⁷

On March 17, 1933, the money manager receives the long-awaited reward: Hitler appoints him President of the Reichsbank. His second career under the cross begins.

Schacht quickly came to terms with the criminal regime in the Third Reich. At the beginning of August 1934, he enthusiastically accepted the additional office of Reich Minister of Economics - four weeks after Hitler had his opponents murdered in the so-called Röhm Putsch. This was an influential position, as a specially enacted "Law on Economic Measures" allowed almost unlimited authority, even if it meant breaking existing laws. In May 1935, the Nazi minister was also given the title of

"Plenipotentiary General for the War Economy", in recognition of the work he had already done for rearmament.

This was to lead directly to the Second World War - and Hitler's banker created the financial basis for this. Without his artful financial maneuvers, the radical expansion of the German military machine would have been inconceivable.

Beyond scruples, Schacht subordinated everything else to this goal, including his conviction, preached for years, that a state must operate soundly and must not run up debts. The official Reich defense budget amounted to 700 to 800 million marks a year, and Schacht managed to increase this sum to the astronomical amount of 35 billion marks over eight years. To achieve this, he used the instrument of Mefo bills of exchange, which were drawn on the dummy company Metallurgische Forschungsgesellschaft mbH (Mefo) and guaranteed by the Reichsbank.

But then Schacht overstepped the mark. Obviously overestimating his importance and prestige with Hitler, he tried to usurp further responsibilities - in vain. Instead, Hermann Göring took on more and more tasks. Schacht falls behind and consequently sees his chances of promotion as over. In August 1937, he asked Hitler for his dismissal, which was granted at the end of November. However, Schacht remained Reichsbank President until January 1939 and Reich Minister without responsibility in the cabinet until January 1943 - he was far from ready to break with the regime. On the contrary, the head of the Reichsbank was still singing the dictator's praises in 1938:

"I consider it impossible that even a single person will find a future with us who does not wholeheartedly support Adolf Hitler. Anyone who does not do so should remove himself from our circle. The Reichsbank will only ever be National Socialist or I will no longer be its head. A threefold Sieg Heil to our Führer!"⁴⁸ On the other hand, Schacht did not cultivate the violent anti-Semitism of the Nazis. In a memorandum in 1935, he demanded: "The Jews should be stamped as inferior citizens to any extent desired by means of appropriate laws, but for the rights they are to be allowed, they should be granted state protection against fanatics and the uneducated"⁴⁹ - a kind of discrimination underpinned by legalism.

As the end of the Third Reich looms, Schacht knows that it is once again time to change sides in good time. Until then, he had only expressed criticism of the regime behind closed doors. He tries to get a job with the American government and emigrate. He is unsuccessful. He establishes contacts with resistance circles without wanting to become actively involved in the fight against the Nazis. The opponents of the regime, on the other hand, were suspicious of the prominent helper: within the conspirators of July 20, 1944, Schacht was considered a "feared ambitious man", according to the police records of the time, "Schacht was rejected. The rejection was based above all on his excessive ambition, because it was important to him to play a role at all costs. Goerdeler says: "Ambition drove him to take any action that the political situation required."⁵⁰ This did not prevent Schacht from later describing himself as a long-time resistance fighter and victim of the National Socialist regime.



Adolf Hitler and Hjalmar Schacht, Reichsbank President and Head of the Reich Ministry of Economics, at the laying of the foundation stone of the new Reichsbank

socialism. Three days after the assassination attempt on Hitler in July 1944, the 67-year-old former Nazi minister was arrested and sent to the Ravensbrück, Flossenbürg and Dachau concentration camps, with certain privileges as an "honorary prisoner".

"honorary prisoner". The Americans liberated him and at the same time arrested him again as a war criminal.

He now sits in the dock in the Nuremberg courtroom and awaits his verdict. Most of his co-defendants have already been sentenced to death by hanging. His verdict is: acquittal - for lack of evidence. Only the Russian judge has pleaded for the death penalty. A free

Schacht is far from being a man. The German justice system has him arrested again. In a court case in Stuttgart, he is sentenced to eight years in a labor camp as the "main culprit" and his assets are confiscated. Schacht defends himself against this in further court proceedings. After five trials, the files are finally closed in September 1950: Schacht remains unpunished and is now considered "exonerated". Back in freedom, the clean-cut Nazi rearmament minister worked as a financial consultant in Indonesia, Iran and Egypt, wrote books on money matters and founded the private bank Schacht & Co. On June 3, 1970, he died in Munich at the age of 93 as a result of a broken hip. Self-doubt about his actions and his fatal drive for power did not plague Hitler's banker until his death - as he describes his philosophy in a poem: "Only the low defends itself.

The high falls in battle and ostrich. The rabbit people multiply, And the lions die out.

And if the lions die, I don't want to be a rabbit."

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Chronology

1918

January

Rudolf Freiherr von Sebottendorff founds the Thule Society, a right-wing nationalist association.

November 7/8

Revolution in Munich, Kurt Eisner (USPD) forms provisional government.

November 9

Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicates. The German Republic is proclaimed in Berlin.

November 11 Armistice comes
into force.

1919

Foundation of the KPD

at the turn of the year

January 5

The locksmith Anton Drexler and the journalist Karl Harrer found the German Workers' Party (DAP) in Munich.

January 15

Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg are murdered in Berlin.

February 5

National Assembly convenes in Weimar.

February 11

Friedrich Ebert (SPD) is elected President of the Reich.

February 21

Eisner is assassinated.

April 7

Soviet Republic is proclaimed in Munich.

May 1-2

Reichswehr and Freicorps troops bloodily crush the Soviet Republic in Munich. June
Hitler takes part in propaganda training on behalf of the Reichswehr and then works as a
political agitator in the army.

June 28

Peace Treaty of Versailles is signed.

11. August

Weimar Constitution comes into force.

12. September

Hitler attends a meeting of the DAP on behalf of the Reichswehr. A few days later he
joins the party, membership number 555.

1920

January 1

Opening of the first DAP office in Munich in the "Fürstenfelder Hof".

February 24

Meeting of the German Workers' Party in the Hofbräuhaus, Hitler announces the 25-point party program, renamed the National Socialist German Workers' Party.

13. until March 17

Kapp Putsch in Berlin, flight of the Reich government, proclamation of the general strike.

March 31

Hitler is dismissed from the Reichswehr.

1921

January 21

1. General Assembly of the NSDAP.

January 22 to 29

Paris Conference sets German reparations payments at over 200 billion gold marks.

April 27

Reparation payments are reduced to 132 billion gold marks. July

Leadership crisis in the NSDAP, Hitler resigns from the party in order to push through his demands for reorganization.

July 29

An extraordinary general meeting elects Hitler as party chairman with dictatorial powers.

August 26

Right-wing radicals assassinate the former Finance Minister Matthias Erzberger.

1922

January

Inflation begins, 1 dollar is 200 German paper marks.

May 29

Lecture by Hitler to business leaders at the National Club in Berlin.

June 24

Right-wing extremists assassinate Foreign Minister Walter Rathenau. Hitler is sent to prison for a month for blowing up an opposing party event.

18. July

The Reichstag passes the Republic Protection Act.

14. October

"German Day" in Coburg with a performance by the NSDAP.

October 28

Benito Mussolini's "March on Rome", beginning of the fascist seizure of power in Italy.

December

1 dollar costs 100.00 paper marks.

1923

January 11

French troops occupy the Ruhr area. Start of passive resistance.

January 27 to 29

First Reich Party Congress of the NSDAP in

Munich. March

The former air force captain Hermann Göring becomes commander of the SA.

September 1-2

"German Day" of right-wing organizations with 100,000 participants in Munich.

September 26

The Bavarian government declares a state of emergency and appoints Gustav von Kahr as State Commissioner General with far-reaching powers.

September 27

The Reich government declares a state of emergency throughout Germany and passive resistance in the Ruhr area is broken off.

October

Hyperinflation reaches its peak.

November 8/9

Hitler putsch in Munich. On November 9, Hitler, General Erich Ludendorff and right-wing paramilitary groups march through Munich to the Feldherrnhalle. Firefight with the police, 18 dead. As a result, the NSDAP, SA and Völkischer Beobachter are banned and Hitler is arrested.

15. November

Currency conversion brings an end to inflation: one trillion marks equals one Rentenmark.

1924

January 21

Death of

Lenin.

February 26

Start of the treason trial against Hitler and his co-defendants.

April 1

Hitler is sentenced to five years in prison. Ludendorff acquitted.

June 18

Hitler resigns from the leadership of the party.

December 20

Early release of Hitler from Landsberg prison. The NS leader has written wrote "Mein Kampf" there.

1925

February 27

Hitler announces the re-establishment of the NSDAP. Appointment of Franz Xaver Schwarz as Reich Treasurer.

March 9

The Bavarian government imposes a speech ban on Hitler.

April 26

Field Marshal Paul Hindenburg is elected Reich President.

June 24

Opening of the new NSDAP office at Schellingstrasse 50 in Munich.

September 25

Prussia bans Hitler from speaking.

November 9

Foundation of the SS (Schutzstaffel).

1926

July 3-4

Second Reich Party Congress of the NSDAP in Weimar.

8. September

Germany is admitted to the League of Nations.

9. November

Joseph Goebbels becomes Gauleiter in Berlin.

1927

5. March

The Bavarian government lifts the ban on Hitler speaking.

6. May

The NSDAP is banned in Berlin and Cologne.

19./August 21

Third Reich Party Congress of the NSDAP in Nuremberg

1928

2. January

Hitler appoints Goebbels as Reich Propaganda Director.

March 31

NSDAP ban in Berlin and Cologne is lifted.

20. May

Reichstag election brings the Nazi movement 810,000 votes and 12 seats.

September 28

Prussia lifts the ban on speech against Hitler.

1929

January 6

Hitler appoints Heinrich Himmler as Reichsführer of the SS.

June 23

The NSDAP wins its first majority in a municipal election in Coburg.

1./August 4

Fourth Reich Party Congress of the NSDAP in
Nuremberg. End of October
Stock market crash in New York, start of the global economic crisis.
22. December
Referendum against the Young Plan.

1930

23. January
Wilhelm Frick becomes the first National Socialist minister in Thuringia.
May 30
Appointment of Brüning as Reich Chancellor.
2./June 5
Ban on uniforms for SA and NSDAP.
September 14
Reichstag election: NSDAP achieves 6.4 million votes and 107 seats.

1931

February
Around 5 million unemployed.
July 13
Collapse of the Danat Bank, banking crisis.
October 11
Meeting of national opposition politicians in Bad Harzburg ("Harzburg Front").

1932

February
Unemployment peaks at 6.13 million.
March 13
1. Election round of the Reich presidential election. Hitler receives 30.1 percent of the vote.
10. April
2. Election round: Hindenburg is re-elected Reich President. Hitler receives 36.8 percent of the vote.
April 13
SA is banned throughout Germany.
May 30
Resignation of the Brüning cabinet.
June 14
Reich Chancellor von Papen lifts the ban on uniforms, SA and demonstrations against the NSDAP.
July 31
The NSDAP receives 13.8 million votes in the Reichstag elections, making it the strongest party.
November 6
Despite losses, the NSDAP remains the strongest party in the Reichstag elections with 196 seats.
November 17

Resignation of the von Papen cabinet

December

Appointment of General Kurt von Schleicher as Reich Chancellor

December 8

Gregor Strasser resigns from all offices.

1933

January 4

Meeting between Hitler and Papen in the house of the banker Schröder in Cologne.

January 28

Resignation of the Schleicher cabinet.

January 30

Hitler is appointed Reich Chancellor.